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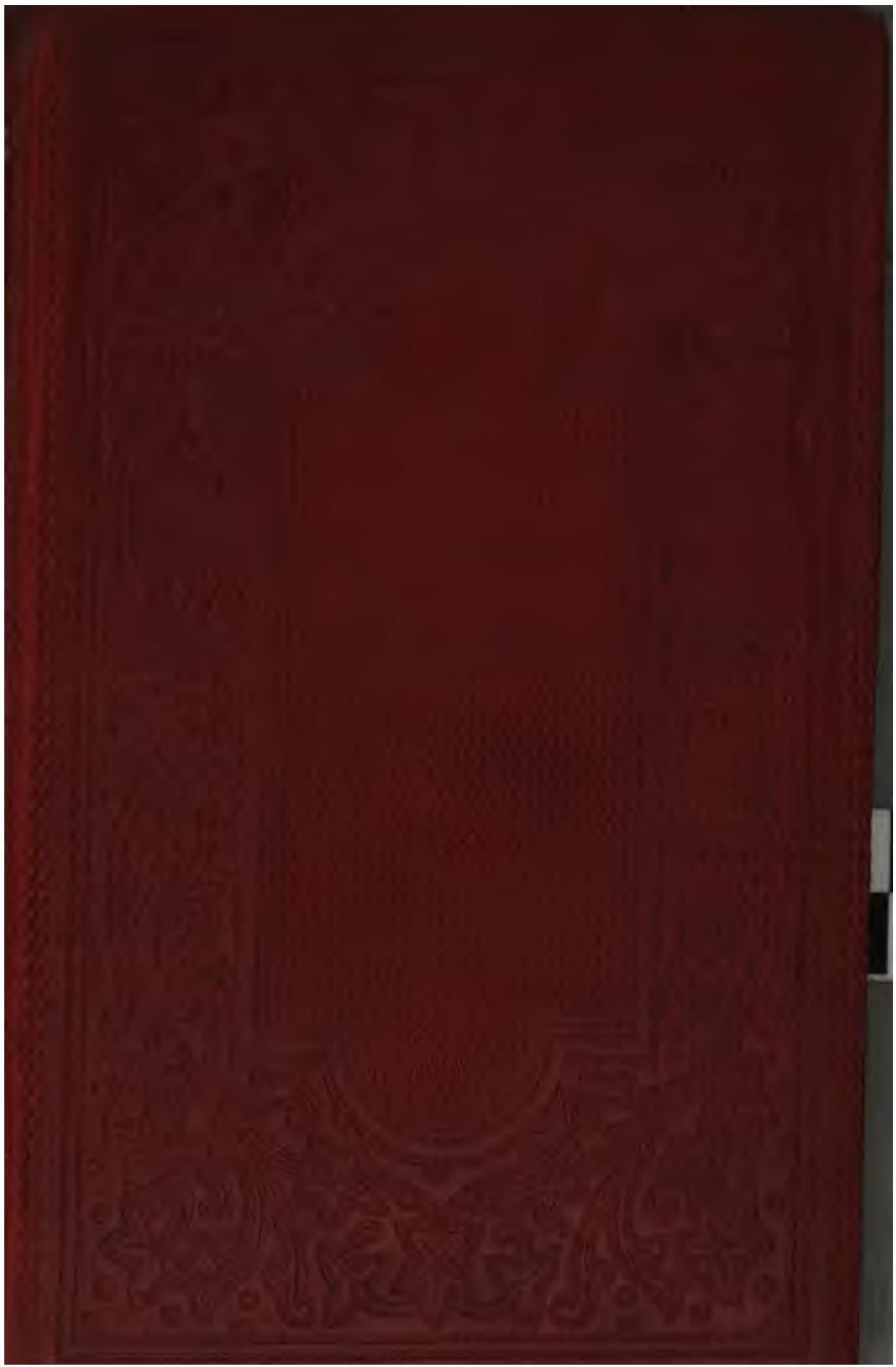
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MILDRED'S LAST NIGHT;
OR,
THE FRANKLYNS.

,

MILDRED'S LAST NIGHT;

OR,

THE FRANKLYNS.

BY THE AUTHOR

OF

'AGGESDEN VICARAGE,' 'THE WYNNES,' ETC.



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To Two Dwellers
in
A "House with Seven Gables."

FEB. 6TH, 1863.

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THE FRANKLYNS.

CHAPTER I.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

“WELL, Margaret?”

The speaker was the new rector of Bayfield, a living in the gift of St. Saviour's, Oxford, of which college he had, until his marriage, been both tutor and fellow. The person addressed was his wife, the bride of one month only.

“It is all that I had expected, all that I have ever wished,” she answered, turning to him a face which Mr. Franklyn might be excused for thinking all that he “had ever wished,” and mere acquaintances for finding only kindly and commonplace.

“In spite of the house being still ‘uninhabitable’ in your brother’s eyes?” asked Mr. Franklyn, with a smile on his somewhat stern though handsome features.

"Charlie's and my own ideas of 'habitable' differ; besides, you are quite right, Charles, in saying that the church must be restored before the parson's house."

"Yes, indeed!" And the smile was gone as the new rector turned so as to gaze through the other parlour window (an old-fashioned oriel) upon the overgrown churchyard and square-sashed windows of the parish church. "Well, Kirkman will be here to-morrow, so twenty-four hours hence we shall better know what can be done."

"Let us go and look through it ourselves now," said his wife.

"I was afraid you might be too tired."

"Not too tired to see your church. I shall be only a minute putting on my bonnet again;" and Mrs. Franklyn hurried away, and in less than five minutes was restraining her own impatience to see the interior of that church in which her husband had once preached, in order to suit her pace to his slower and more thoughtful steps. When the low chancel door was reached, he entered first, to stand facing the lines of high deal pews with folded arms, and pain and discontent upon his brow.

His wife, seeing that he was in no mood to be disturbed, stole by him; and passing down the narrow centre aisle found her way up the gallery-steps into

the western gallery itself. The evening sun streamed in with a warm soft light, which, to the mind of Margaret Franklyn, invested even deal pews and square-sashed windows with beauty. With the church also, a few years ago, she would have been fully satisfied ; but six years' acquaintance with, and two years' engagement to Charles Franklyn, had taught her, at least, to *wish* that pews and windows had been more in harmony with the decorated pillars and delicate carvings of the one remaining aisle.

She was still gazing round, quietly and reverently,—now through the western window upon the tiled roofs and spreading walnut-trees of the rectory, when her husband came up the stairs and joined her.

“ This is the first eyesore to be removed,” he said, in low and reverent tones, in which, nevertheless, dwelt much unspoken bitterness.

“ Yes ; but it does not block out the western window so entirely as I had expected.”

“ Have you seen the inscription on its front ? ”

“ No.”

“ Then come and see,” and he led the way downstairs ; and, when both faced the gallery frontage, read, with significant deliberation,—

“ The north aisle of this church having fallen into disrepair,

was pulled down, and this gallery erected to replace the fifty-seven sittings thus lost. 1798.

JAMES COPELAND, *Rector.*

JOHN ROBINSON, } *Churchwardens.*
SAMUEL FIELD, }

"Come," he added, in softer tones than he had yet used, "I think I have discovered in the north brick-wall traces of the pillars of the former aisle; it may be they are still entire: that would greatly facilitate the rebuilding of the aisle."

"But the cost?"

"It must be done, Margaret," he answered briefly, and then led her to the whitewashed excrescence which gave good hope of hereafter proving to be one of the foliated capitals of the lost northern pillars.

"I can at least discover whether it is stone beneath these coats of whitewash. Field told me, with great satisfaction, how regularly it always had been whitewashed, both in his time and that of his father before him."

"Poor old man! he knows no better," said Mrs. Franklyn, as her husband took out his knife, and began to scrape away at the excrescence.

"And is too old now to *learn* better, I'm afraid;" but thenceforward Mr. Franklyn became engrossed in his occupation, and his wife once more stole away, this time to the east end of the church; and

there, on the large marble tablet on the southern aisle of the east window, read the words—

TO THE MEMORY

OF

LUCY PRISCILLA, WIFE OF THE REV. JAMES COPÉLAND,
RECTOR OF THIS PARISH, FORMERLY FELLOW OF
ST. SAVIOUR'S COLLEGE, OXFORD.

SHE WAS DAUGHTER AND COHEIRESS OF WALTER PRIDEAUX, OF
CORBE, STAFFORDSHIRE, ESQ., AND DESCENDED ON HER MOTHER'S
SIDE OF THE ANCIENT FAMILIES OF PERCY AND LANGHOLME.
SHE WAS A GOOD WIFE, AN EXCELLENT MOTHER, AND A FIRM
FRIEND TO THE NEEDY AND DISTREST. SHE DIED

JUNE 20TH, 1794,
IN THE 38TH YEAR OF HER AGE.
“SIC TRANSIT GLORIA MUNDI.”

ALSO,

JUDITH MARIA, 2ND DAUGHTER OF THE ABOVE,
WHO DIED DEC. 17, 1801. ÆTAT. 13.
“UNTIMELY NIPT.”

ALSO, OF WALTER PRIDEAUX, 3RD SON OF THE ABOVE.
DIED MAY 4, 1807. ÆTAT. 21.

After reading this, Mrs. Franklyn forgot to follow out her first intention, that of exploring the small mortuary chapel of the Langholme family, which had escaped the destruction of the north aisle; but returned to the western end of the church, and here, the sun falling on her face, lighting it without adding colouring, for the sun had all but sunk behind Bareridge Hill, re-read the offending inscription.

Her husband, meaning to tell her exultingly

that his labours had resulted in the discovery of a stone capital, stopped his words as he caught sight of her simple, contented, and yet thoughtful expression ; and only when, having finished her task, she turned round and saw him, said once more,—

“ Well, Margaret ?”

“ I was only wondering, Charles, whether, in 1888, another new rector would be finding some scrap of this inscription, blaming you for pulling it down, and saying he must restore it.”

“ It may be so,” he answered gravely ; “ but I think, I trust, the sun of church architecture has re-arisen never again to be set to us.”

“ Mr. Copeland thought *this* beautiful,” said his wife, a little perplexed.

“ But he was mistaken,” replied Mr. Franklyn with certainty ; “ and now, my dear, we had better go home.”

His wife once more followed him ; but as she passed out from under the low arch, which caused even this woman of five feet three to bend her head, he saw her glance at the tablet on the eastern wall.

“ That will be a more lasting eyesore,” he said, with a grave smile, “ it is in painfully bad taste ; but we must make up our minds for some irremediable thorns, Margaret.”

"Oh yes! I was not thinking of its taste or style," answered Mrs. Franklyn, looking her husband full in the face; "Charles, I was wondering whether we, too, shall have buried dear ones here before our own time comes."

"If it has been God's will," said he with calm gravity; but he placed his wife's arm within his own, and, as soon as they were within their own door, took her two hands in his, and kissed her lips.

It was but twice before that he had thus kissed her: on the day when her brother, a Manchester millowner, had at length sanctioned their engagement; and on the day that she had become his wife. The slightly saddened face became radiant with joy, and something of this radiance was still brightening its seldom failing content, as, after that night's reading of the Psalms for the evening, Mrs. Franklyn turned back to those of the morning, and having written in pencil at their head "June 3rd, 1832, Bayfield Rectory," drew a faint line against the verses—

"6. The Lord himself is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou shalt maintain my lot.

"7. The lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground: yea, I have a goodly heritage."

CHAPTER II.

THE PROJECT AND ITS COST.

ABOUT two weeks later, Mrs. Franklyn was knocking at the door of her husband's study, at an hour which he always spent apart; but the tri-weekly post had brought a letter which must contain Mr. Kirkman's promised estimate for the restoration of Bayfield church.

"What do you want, my dear?" he asked, unbolting the door.

"There is a letter from Mr. Kirkman. I thought you would not mind my bringing it."

"Thank you," he answered, taking the letter, and closing the door again; but a moment later re-opening it to say, "You will like to see what he says, Margaret, and I should not look at it just now."

Mrs. Franklyn took the letter, doubtful whether to make use of a permission which perplexed her; but once again at her solitary needlework in the parlour, the desire to learn what the estimated cost

of the restorations upon which her husband had set his heart had proved to be, conquered her reluctance. She opened the large packet, glanced to the total of the column of figures, and then leant back with a gasp of despair.

“ He will never be able to do it—how sorry I am ! ”

Though she had resumed her needlework long before her husband had joined her, the grieved expression still upon her face made him ask, “ What is the matter ? ” before himself looking down the open sheet.

“ £2,150, Charles,” she said.

“ Is it ? ” he asked, with a peculiar smile,—a smile which she, as Margaret Saunderson, had known well. It was that with which he had, two years ago, met her brother’s opposition to the renewal of their engagement; with the quiet words, that now that Margaret was of age, and still of the same mind, their engagement was become a fact in no brother’s power again to dissipate. “ Still the restoration must be made—we must think how.”

“ It is so much larger than Mr. Kirkman first thought.”

“ Yes; you see he has come to the conclusion that the pillars encrusted in the rubbish of 1798 must be rebuilt—would not support arches and

roof ; ” and then Mr. Franklyn went to the window, took out his pencil, and made some calculations on the back of the architect’s cover. These he presently put before his wife ; they ran thus :

Charles Saunderson	£100 (?)
St. Saviour’s	300 (?)
Parish	50
C. F.	800
Old Friends	50
	—
	£1,300

“ And the other £800 or £900 ? But, Charles, I doubt whether Charlie will give you anything.”

“ He must, for the sake of ‘ auld lang syne,’ when I daily did his Latin verses for him, before *you* came as a source of contention between us, Maggie.”

“ Yes, I think now that we are married, he will come back to you. As long as I was Margaret Saunderson, he felt bound to try to make me, in his eyes, do better for myself. I don’t know what he will say, Charles, to your expending all your college savings on the church.”

“ He will have no right to say anything ; what do you say to it ? ”

“ I am ready,” said Margaret Franklyn, putting her hand on her husband’s, with a smile ; nevertheless, it cost her something thus indefinitely to post-

pone all prospect of seeing their home made more tidy in her own eyes, more "habitable" in those of the brother, who had in all matters of importance, save her engagement to his former school-fellow, been uniformly kind to his orphan sister.

"But if all do as much as one can hope for, £900 remains," said Mr. Franklyn abstractedly, as he gathered together Mr. Kirkman's sheets and cover, and left the room. His asking what his wife thought of the appropriation of all, instead of the pre-arranged half, of his savings to the restoration of his church, had been but a matter of form; thinking so highly of her as he did, it never struck him that hesitation or reluctance could be possible.

Margaret saw him take up his hat and go out. In about two hours he returned, re-entered the parlour, laid his hand on her shoulder, and said cheerfully, "Maggie, I see a way, if you will bear your share of the burden."

"What, Charles?"

"I can take pupils."

"But you were so thankful to have done with tuition."

"That does not matter; if you will not object to our private comfort being so soon broken in upon."

"Perhaps you will not get them just at present, Charles;" for Mrs. Franklyn did mind a little, and was so anxious that her brother should not be further estranged by what—though really self-renunciation which made her heart glow, and herself wonder more than ever how Charles Franklyn had ever chosen her for his wife—Charles Saunderson would probably consider fresh folly.

"I do not feel afraid of not being able to get pupils at once; a college name is worth something," said Mr. Franklyn, looking back, with more pleasure than he had done for some years, upon the high degree which had, at the time, filled the heart of the north country servitor with pride and delight: "still, if you have any very great objection, I would try to find other means."

"No, I will not object; but—will they be very big boys?"

"From twelve to fourteen. I should like to keep them for the three or four years we must have pupils to ensure the end,—they would actually cost us, what? £30? 4 times 70, 280; 4 times 280, 1120: most likely after-contingencies will arrive, and this be by no means too much. I am going to ask your brother for a subscription—have you anything to say?"

"Be conciliating, don't,"—Margaret Franklyn

paused and blushed at her own eagerness and intention of dictating to her husband.

“You shall sit in judgment on the letter when it is written,” answered her husband, gravely and humbly; perhaps he had *not* been guiltless in the many late differences with the chief friend of his school-days. Should not he, at this very moment, have been as intent on this world’s fame as Charles Saunderson was on this world’s comforts, but for the influence of — and — upon his own college days?

When, a quarter of an hour later, Mrs. Franklyn knocked again at her husband’s door to tell him dinner was ready, he called her to his side, and putting a newly written letter into her hands, watched her expression whilst reading it. It was slightly amused, but content; and as she restored the sheet to his desk, she volunteered the remark,

“ You make very sure of getting what you want.”

“ Yes; I would not wrong Charles so much as to think he would not help me in a scheme which I have so much at heart as this.”

“ He will grumble, or pretend to do so, and say you are making him pay very dearly for the Latin verses of fifteen years ago; but will give you what you ask—he is really generous, Charles.”

Whereupon, Mr. Franklyn stroked his wife's cheek, wiped his pen, and followed her to the parlour.

After dinner, letters to the master of St. Saviour's, and to various old school, college, and north country friends were written ; and later, Mr. Franklyn drove his wife into Huntingdon, to post them.

Many days passed by quietly before an answer was received to any of these letters. The churchyard had, meanwhile, been put in order ; kindly showers had refreshed the dry brown stubble into which the mowing had at first transformed its rampant grass ; hay-harvest had begun, and Margaret and her husband were seated reading under the shade of a walnut tree, in one of their own hayfields, when Farmer Field's carter came up to them with the first answer to any of these appeals. Farmer Field had been into Huntingdon, and had asked whether there were any letters for Mr. Franklyn, as the "Missus had seemed so anxious like."

"I have been wanting so much to know what Charlie would say," confessed "the Missus" to her husband, with a slight blush ; the carter having made his bow and departed.

"And he says," said Mr. Franklyn, glancing down the letter, "he will give the £100—nay, £150, if I will promise to enter on no further

quixotic scheme this year. Well! I think I may safely make the promise; the church is likely to occupy all one's thoughts for many years to come."

"But what does he say about the pupils?"

"That he always thought I was mad, and now he knows it. Still—well, this is really generous."

"What, Charles?" asked Margaret eagerly; "he would rather give the £900?"

"No; but that if I have really made up my mind to such a nuisance as private pupils, he may as well send his own son to me, when he's old enough for me, as to any one else; his mother won't hear of his going to school, but somewhere he must go some day; and Maria thinks 'Margaret will be kind to him.'"

"I hope she will, poor boy!"

"Yes, poor boy! I wonder at Charles's thinking of ever sending him to me; we must understand one another clearly before I receive him."

"Oh, Charles! don't make any difficulty."

"No; but your brother must understand distinctly that, if I have him, I cannot confine my teaching to Latin and Greek,—that I shall do my best to make him far 'madder' than myself."

"Charles knows you well enough to know you will do that."

"Yes, I think he does; but I must make the

supposition a certainty. I shall like to have that boy, Maggie ; he is a straightforward, sensible lad, spoilt though he be."

" He is a good deal like what I remember Charles himself."

" Yes, very much like him indeed," he answered thoughtfully ; " and it is very generous of Charles to entrust his son to me after so many hard words."

" But he seldom spoke hardly of you to *others* ; he could not shake off the love of ' auld lang syne ' any more than yourself. Oh, Charles ! I always did hope that we should all draw closely together again, and now it really does seem that it will be so."

" If this boy and we do but agree. Well, Maggie, how shall we manage with another Charles ? "

" We must call him Launcelot, as grandmamma does. Maria herself often does so. ' Charlie ' and ' Charles ' are confusing enough already."

" The boy is so unlike one's ideal Sir Launcelot."

" Oh ! Arthur's knight ? but he is very like his Lancashire grandfather, from whom his name really comes : and uncle Launcelot is so familiar to us."

" Yes, Launcelot let it be. I little thought Charles Saunderson would be the first to promise me a pupil."

CHAPTER III.

LAUNCELOT SAUNDERSON.

THE first tiles had been placed on the roof of the north aisle of Bayfield Church on the day upon which Mrs. Franklyn first became a mother. It was a happiness never forgotten by either husband or wife.

"What shall her name be?" asked Margaret, not many days later, as Mr. Franklyn sat beside her, fondling the long white fingers.

"There is but one name for a first daughter—Mary, the little 'handmaid of the Lord.'"

"I have always had such a fancy to have a daughter named Mildred."

"Have you, my love? but another daughter, not this."

"Very well, Charles. Mary is simpler. I wonder whether Mrs. Copeland's little girl was born in winter or summer?"

"What little girl?"

"The one buried with her mother. I wish you

would look and see for me, Charles. You could find out in the register, could you not?"

"Yes, my love, the next time I am in the church."

Mr. Franklyn did not forget his promise, and the next day came into his wife's room with a copy of the baptismal register of "Judith Maria Cope-land." The date was August 4th, 1788.

"It does not say when she was born?"

"No. I have copied all the information given; probably the child was a month old. Next Sunday I hope to admit *our* darling into Christ's Church."

"Oh, Charles! it would be such a risk."

"It was the custom of the early Church."

"In warmer climates," interrupted Mrs. Franklyn, raising herself energetically, and speaking with flushed cheeks.

"Not warmer than England is in June, my dear," said her husband soothingly.

"It—it is my only one! don't try experiments upon it!" entreated Mrs. Franklyn, tears running down her cheeks.

"My dear, there is no risk. I assure you I would not do anything to harm her."

"I hope not."

"Indeed I would not! How can you doubt me, Maggie!"

"Mr. Wauchope, who had been at Oxford, christened his baby eight days, too, after it was born, and it died within the week."

"And 't is certain, by God's Word, that children which are baptized, dying before they commit actual sin, are undoubtedly saved.'"

"But if he had not taken it out in the snow it might have been living now!"

"Then Wauchope's child was born in mid-winter?"

"I suppose it was."

"And ours in mid-summer."

"But it may rain; we *do* have cold days in June."

"My dear, if there be any real risk I will not run it: are you content?"

"I must be," answered Mrs. Franklyn, laying herself back upon the pillows, with pale instead of flushed cheeks.

Mr. Franklyn looked at her doubtfully; not with any doubt as to whether he should persist in carrying out his point, but doubt as to whether it were possible that the new blessing of motherhood was weakening instead of strengthening her faith.

The child was christened, and christened "Mary," on the following Sunday, July 9th. It thrived and grew, and Mrs. Franklyn forgot all fears; nay,

so outlived them, that when, five years later, a twin brother and sister were born to the trim, good, active little Mary, she suffered the same early day to be fixed on for their christening without an attempt at remonstrance.

"Charles," she then said, "I have a fancy about this little girl's name. You must let me have my way this time."

"Ah! you wished little Mary to have been named, what? Millicent? But I don't think even *das kleine Mütterchen* could have been as dear with any other name. Well, I have thought this would have, of course, been named Margaret; but, if you wish it, Millicent can be added, though the alliteration is not pleasant."

"It was 'Mildred' for which I once wished," answered Mrs. Franklyn, with just that grave gentle smile which was often on the healthy brown face and pretty brown eyes of the little Mary, and had gained the child from her father the pet name which he had just used. "That fancy is not gone; but just now I have a stronger one. Baby was born on May 24th; let her be called after our young Queen, Victoria."

"Margaret Victoria! Yes, my love, you shall have your own way this time."

"Thank you. I think she will suit the name,

fine as it is. It seems to me, Charles, she will be a great beauty some day."

"She can never have half the charms of 'the little mother;' even at five years old that child is of use."

"Yes; she is so good, little darling! but I think Victoria will be a beautiful as well as good woman. See how long her little fingers are. She will be tall! And how lovely her blue eyes—she will be like your sister Caroline."

"Not entirely, I hope, Maggie."

"We will bring her up so well that her beauty shall not spoil her. How proud I shall be some day of chaperoning my two daughters;" and Mrs. Franklyn smiled so happily, that her husband had no heart to find fault with the entrance of worldly thoughts at such a time. .

The little Mary was taken to the church, and stood grave and serious by her father's side whilst the baptismal service was being read, her fingers locked into the hand of Charles Launcelot Saunderson, who, from the day that he had first become an inmate of Bayfield rectory, three months ago, (for, a pattern as Bayfield church had long been in decency and order to all its country neighbours, Mr. Franklyn still, year by year, was adding to its beauties, and to be enabled to do this still took pupils,) had

been her slave and admirer. 'Tis true, Mary used her power very gently; but then she had full certainty of meeting with obedience when she did care to exercise it.

She stayed out the remainder of the service, grave and still; pattering up to her mother's room so soon as taken back to the rectory, and, after stopping for the kiss for which her mother called her, went on to the cradles, where lay her little brother and sister, and, kissing them, said gently, "You, too, are little Christians; now I shall love you dearly."

Mr. Saunderson, whom business had unexpectedly brought into Huntingdonshire, and who was paying his first visit to Bayfield, burst into a loud laugh, caught up his little niece, and asked, "And what were they *before* to-day, then?"

"The children of wrath," responded Mary, quietly, looking as if she saw no reason for any merriment in anything that had passed.

"Well, I never thought Charles would have indoctrinated a child of five with such absurdity," cried Mr. Saunderson, half-amused, half-indignant. "Thousands of children die unbaptized every year, dear girl. Do you condemn them all to perdition?"

"I don't know what perdition means, uncle; but their parents must be very wicked people."

“And—”

But Mrs. Franklyn interposed: “Don’t puzzle her, Charlie. Mary, run down and see if papa is not coming.”

Later that evening, Mr. Saunderson, looking for his son to take a farewell walk with him, found him in his own room, a prayer-book before him, his lips busily moving.

“What are you doing, Lance? come out for a turn,” said the father, in his noisy, good-natured tones.

“I can’t yet, father.”

“What are you about?”

“Learning ‘what is your duty to your neighbour;’ and it is so hard!”

“Well, put it by now and come out.”

“Oh! but I must know it *quite* before I go out.”

“Oh! you have learnt obedience to your uncle,” said Mr. Saunderson, sitting down close to the boy. “Well, what will you do, stay here or go home with me?”

“Stay here,” answered the lad emphatically, after a moment’s pause.

“And spend your Sunday evenings pent up in this wretched little place, learning ‘your duty to your neighbour.’ Well, it is a lesson you needed.”

"And Mary knows to the end of it already."

"Mary is a miracle."

"She's the nicest—— Father, I wanted to tell you one thing—when I'm old enough I mean to marry her."

"You must ask your uncle——"

"He *shall* consent!" interrupted the boy, with a tone and glance that showed how hot his blood was where his affections were concerned.

"Maybe he *will* consent," said Mr. Saunderson carelessly; "seeing he'll have had the rearing of you, it will be hard if he has not turned you out to his own mind. So I am to tell mamma you are perfectly happy here?"

"Sometimes—not always. I have been *miserable*," said Launcelot.

"When you've made the vain attempt to make Charles Franklyn give in to you, instead of yielding yourself? Ah! I warned you, Charlie, your fits of passion wouldn't do here."

"No; they don't. I can't help having them sometimes though."

"Well, it will be a blessing to us next Christmas if you have been taught to have them only 'sometimes.'

"So you don't want to come back?" added the man, rising, and putting his hand with rough fond-

ness under the boy's chin, and turning up the face till the eyes met his.

"No; not when you're away. I wish you would not seem to think I can do as I like about it," added the son, almost pettishly.

"Don't you want to do as you like?"

"No! it is much better to do what is right."

"Heigh-ho! You talking in this strain, and little Mary of 'children of wrath,' it's time for me to be going. When you've learnt your lesson come down, you'll find me waiting about for you;" and then Mr. Saunderson sauntered out into the garden, to lay his hand, unexpectedly, on his brother-in-law's shoulder, and to say, "Launcelot is a most promising pupil, eh, Charles?"

"He is not——"

"So bad as he was," interposed Mr. Saunderson, as the uncle hesitated. "Well! to hear a boy, who, four months ago, sacrificed every one to his own pleasure as a matter of course, say gravely, 'it is better to do what is right than to do what you like,' seems to me perfection."

"If it were acted on as well as said," answered Mr. Franklyn, briefly; too shy and proud to show the pleasure that such a maxim, from such lips, had really given him.

"Just as severe as ever!" cried Mr. Saunder-

son, with some vexation and disappointment. “I fancied children would have taught you—charity! There, I’ve out with it, priest though you be, and I nothing but a—— Ah, Mary! just in time to stop a quarrel; your father and I can’t meet yet without sparring.”

“Mother wants you, father,” said the child, after a glance of incomprehension from one to another.

“I will come; and, Mary, run up and tell Launcelot he may come out,” and Mr. Franklyn turned towards the house.

And Mr. Saunderson was left alone, thinking bitterly, “So he won’t leave even a child of five alone with me; I wouldn’t have abused his absence. Perhaps he meant kindly though by sending for the boy; Franklyn never could grant a favour with a good grace; ‘he that showeth mercy with cheerfulness,’ there’s more in that text than even Franklyn’s seen in it yet, Greek scholar though he be, and a good man too.”

And then Launcelot joined him; and in being shown his boy’s garden, his rabbits, and, as a great favour and secret, a wooden box of mignonette, sown in the form of “Mary Franklyn,” which name was already traceable in the fresh green leaves, Mr. Saunderson forgot his wrath. He

delighted Margaret, when he went into her room the next morning to bid her "good-bye," by saying, "Franklyn's done wonders with that boy already. I am sure I am very much obliged to you both. He had become unbearable at home."

"We are so glad to have him; Charles always liked him," answered Mrs. Franklyn, with dewy eyes. "Sometimes I fear you would think him severe; but indeed he means it for the best."

"I know that, Maggie; I expect it is a good thing sometimes I am not always by. Well, I had fancied," he added, with something of sadness, "we might have met now as old friends; but six years has not been separation enough, after all."

"Oh, Charlie! don't say so. He—"

"Can't help thinking me a reprobate. Ah! but *you* can, Maggie, so it does not so much signify. Come, give me a kiss, I must be off; and don't distress yourself if my boy does get sharply handled, I sent him here with my eyes open,—can't say as much for his poor mother's." And with a laugh and a kiss, that had in them a good deal more emotion than Mr. Saunderson had had any intention of showing, he was gone; and Mrs. Franklyn lay back upon her pillows, feeling that, some day, surely all would yet be right between the two old friends.

CHAPTER IV.

WHO TAUGHT THE BETTER LESSON ?

“ **Y**OUR brother has made an arrangement which I do not like, but which must, I suppose, stand,” said Mr. Franklyn, some three or four hours later in the day, when Launcelot and his fellow-pupil George Forrest’s morning hours of lessons were over, and their tutor at liberty. The boys had turned out to their gardens, a constant source of interest and emulation, whilst Mr. Franklyn had sought his mental refreshment from his wife and children.

“ And what has Charlie arranged ?”

“ That Launcelot should spend next Sunday at Melsham, with the Bradings; they will send for him on Saturday after school-hours, and bring him back on Monday before them; so what could I object ?”

“ No, and why should you? Mr. Brading is Maria’s own cousin.”

“ I am sorry that the boy’s relations of that

stamp should come within reach of him here. I had hoped Melsham was beyond reach."

"Seventeen miles; it is a very long way to send a boy back by nine on Monday morning; don't you think, Charles, if he were home by dinner-time that would do?"

"Once begin such interruptions, there will be no end to them; I—I wish I had said I could not allow it, but Charles had arranged it all, and seemed so triumphant in having provided for the boy being back by lesson-time on Monday, what could one do?"

"Nothing but let the father judge for his own son," said Margaret gently.

"And so I did, much against my own inclination; and yet Charles seemed to divine my vexation, and to be annoyed by it. Well!" and after this sigh, Mr. Franklyn took up little Victoria, and would not allow his wife to return to the subject.

The next Saturday, Launcelot Saunderson was driven off in triumph by Mr. Brading, a portly, good-natured London manufacturer, who felt that he was doing his cousin Maria's son the greatest kindness in taking him for two days from the outlandish melancholy country village to which Charles Saunderson had so unaccountably consigned him.

Why, too, he should have chosen the man whose opinions he derided, of whose harsh temper he had so often complained, to be his only son's tutor, was a mystery which deeper thinkers than Mr. Brading would have found it hard to fathom.

Just as the Bayfield rectory party were assembling for prayers on the Monday morning, Mr. Brading's gig drove up, Launcelot alighted from it and hurried into the dining-room, where Mr. Franklyn signed to him to take his place, and forthwith began the morning's reading. So soon as the prayers were ended, Mary walked up to her cousin, and, holding up her face for a kiss, said, "I have watered your geranium every day, Lancy."

"Thank you, and George—ah! I have brought home such a lovely pair of doves, Mary; come and see them."

"I told you that I could allow you no more pets. They must go back to Melsham."

"Mr. Brading says they are such rare ones."

"What Mr. Brading says makes no difference; you should not have brought them, and they must go,—back to Mr. Brading, if you think he will like to have them to give to some other friend; if not, we must find some owner for them in the village."

Launcelot said no more. With Bayfield, old

associations resumed their power. Mr. Brading had laughed to scorn the idea of Mr. Franklyn refusing to let the boy have a bird if it pleased him: how could it hurt any one? be in any one's way? But at Bayfield, Launcelot felt that, as Mr. Franklyn had said he should allow him no more pets, no more pets could he have. But when coming to this conclusion, he remembered how Mr. Brading had called his tutor "a fussy old tyrant, who knew nothing of boys," and felt doubly aggrieved at the remembrance. Mr. Franklyn, meanwhile, felt doubtful as to whether he had done his duty in letting disobedience be passed by so lightly.

Breakfast passed over rather silently; this feeling prevented the uncle from making any kindly inquiries, which he might otherwise have done, after his nephew's occupations at the Bradings. George Forrest, the only fellow-pupil Launcelot possessed during the time that was holidays to those who had been longer at Bayfield, was a newer comer than himself, exceedingly in awe of Mr. Franklyn, and without the courage to make inquiries whilst others were silent; besides which, he had his own secret delinquency on his mind, which Launcelot's half-finished sentence had recalled to mind, and, as soon as they were dis-

missed, he rushed off to the box of mignonette which had been confided to his care, but which *he* had not once remembered to water.

He deluged it now, in his anxiety to atone for his past negligence, and then tried to absorb the pools of water, which remained on the hard earth, with his handkerchief, to make matters look more natural. Whilst thus engaged, Launcelot Saunderson—whose own first thought had been this preparation for his pet Mary's birthday, but who had been stopped in his own immediate progress to it to speak to his aunt—came upon him.

"Are they coming out nicely?" he asked eagerly.

"Pretty well," began Forrest, hoping that something—anything—would happen before the drooping buds and scorched leaves met his schoolfellow's eyes.

But Launcelot pushed him aside, and saw all in an instant. "You have forgotten to water them till this minute?" he demanded fiercely, stamping his foot, and hoarse with passion.

"Yes, I have," replied Forrest, recovering his courage now that discovery was come; "but so long as the little lady herself—"

"Have done with your humbug," cried Launcelot, brushing past him; "I'll teach you to remem-

ber your promise another time ;” and it seemed to George but a moment before he saw his own garden being trampled down, his flowers pulled up, and more mischief done, whilst he stood transfixed with horror, than he could make good in a week.

It was but a minute that George stood still ; the next, he, too, was on his plot of ground, his own face crimson with rage, and his voice hoarse with passion, trying to thrust the slightly bigger boy off into his own division. But before either gained or lost in the close struggle, Mr. Franklyn’s calm voice called to them to let go, and come into the house at once.

They obeyed. George Forrest had once said, “ He didn’t know how it was, but he shouldn’t dare make any objection to eating a scuttle-full of ashes, if Mr. Franklyn left word he was to do it.” And here he, at least, could not be the most to blame. But such a thought passed by unconsciously ; both were too much enraged for obedience to be more than instinctive.

“ He never once watered——”

“ He has trampled down all my best flowers !” cried Forrest, on the verge of tears. He was a strange little compound of cowardice and audacity, silence and drollery, which, little as Mr. Franklyn

had as yet seen of the true George Forrest, was beginning to attract him in spite of himself.

“What do you say that George had done to you?” asked Mr. Franklyn sternly of his nephew.

“Never once watered what he had promised me to water twice a day,” said Launcelot sullenly.

“But, Lancy, he must be so sorry!” said Mary, who had been standing at the foot of the stairs, her mother’s breakfast-tray in her hand; and this tray she had put down to be at liberty to go up to her cousin, and place her hand in his, before uttering the words.

“And for this carelessness you have spoilt the work and growth of months! Look! are you not ashamed of the havoc you have made?”

Launcelot did look; it was greater than even he had thought. Yes, he had done good work in those few moments before George had been upon him. A smile of satisfaction passed over his face, and his answer was, “I only wish I had spoilt everything!”

“Oh, Launcelot!” said Mary, unloosing her hand and gazing on him in dismay.

“I do! He has—”

“Hush, Launcelot! George has been very careless,—George drew himself as close as possible to the wall,—“but this is no excuse for such an out-

break, such unchristian revenge; if George will confess he was in fault, I will say no more to him; he has been punished more than enough already," added Mr. Franklyn, as he glanced again at the trampled waste, visible through the open door.

"I'm very sorry I forgot to water his mignon—" began George; but Launcelot, thinking the secret of the "Mary Franklyn" was about to be betrayed, darted forward, with a ferocity of menace in his gestures which struck George dumb.

"Launcelot, stand still!—you are sorry you forgot to fulfil your promise, George?"

"Yes, Sir; very sorry!"

"Then if Launcelot will say as much for his injury to you, you may both go,—Launcelot shall set your garden to rights this evening, and must make good to you, from his own border, those plants which he has destroyed."

A smile of such derisive scorn passed over Launcelot Saunderson's features at the very notion of *his* ever being compelled to repair his own work of destruction, that Mr. Franklyn felt it was a mere form to say, "You have your choice, Launcelot, say you are sorry for what you have done, or take the consequence of further indulging your evil passions."

Launcelot did not immediately answer. The alternatives were worth one moment's thought; and in that moment Mary stole up to him, and said, "Oh, Lancy, *do* be sorry!"

"Mary, come away, come here!" and Mary went back submissively to her father's side. "Now, Launcelot."

"I am *not* sorry," said Launcelot, raising his head after a moment's further thought, during which Mary's eyes had been bent upon his meditative features; her heart beating with anxiety.

"Then you will follow me," said Mr. Franklyn curtly, moving away; whilst Mary stole from his side to her cousin's, to whisper in a heart-broken voice, "Yes, Lancy, you *are* right not to do this great wickedness and sin against God. It—it *is* better to be beaten than to tell a lie."

But it was a truth which Mary found it very hard herself to receive; though, so soon as the study door was closed, she had run up to the one attic, which even the recent influx of babies had left a lumber-room, and falling on her knees, clasped her hands, and prayed with all her might that God would make Launcelot good, and not make him feel the beating very much.

She was still on her knees, too miserable to cry, too wearied to continue actual words of prayer,

only her hands still clasped,—whilst her little head was bent on the chest before her, with a kind of repose in the feeling that, after all, all was God's will, and must be good,—when she heard her father calling “Mary!”

She sprang up, and ran down. “You have forgotten Mamma's second cup of tea,” he said very gravely, yet very tenderly.

“I am so sorry!”

“And Mary,” he asked, taking her up in his arms, and asking the question low, “what did you mean by telling Launcelot that he could ‘not do this great wickedness and sin against God’?”

“That it would have been wicked to say he was sorry when he was not.”

“But he ought to have been sorry.”

“Yes, Papa, he ought,” said Mary meekly, unconscious of her own victory in the argument.

“There,” and Mr. Franklyn kissed her soft brown face, “now go and fetch mamma's tea;” and then he watched her careful steady steps, half-inclined himself to wonder that children had not taught him charity, or rather, made him weak in exacting justice.

But no, he was not grown weak; he still exacted justice to the letter: so he himself felt, when, the tea which immediately succeeded after-

noon school being over, he saw Launcelot Saunderson, heavy-eyed and with reluctant steps, set himself to work at George Forrest's garden. Nothing had passed between them on the subject since the morning: this obedience almost made Mr. Franklyn wish that he could find some good excuse for, at any rate, postponing the fulfilment of his own order.

"It will be a useful lesson to him through life," he thought within himself as he moved away from the sight of what, conceal it from himself as he would, did still make him uneasy; "such humiliation will teach him, better than anything else can do, to think twice before again giving way to his passions."

And yet Mr. Franklyn had an uneasy feeling that though such reparation done, as a matter of obedience, must do good; that such reparation made, though a little later, as a labour of love, would have done far greater good.

"If I had let the matter alone, I should not have been surprised if Launcelot had got up early, and set all right before breakfast-time," he found himself meditating as he passed through the garden on his way to the village,—he could not look on at this reparation, and found he could not stay in the house without looking on, "yet if I had waited

till the devil had really gone out of him, where would have been the lesson? Ah, you George! do you want anything?"

George had been trying, for the last ten minutes, to summon courage to go to Mr. Franklyn and beg him to let Launcelot off this evening's gardening; but his courage failed him now that the opportunity was made for him, and he answered, hating himself as he did so, "No, Sir."

Mr. Franklyn passed him and went out, yet his visit to Dame Falconer was but a short one; and when he came back, it gave him a kind of start to see Launcelot dig up from his own garden a plot of pinks, and then add it to a basket of other plants similarly uprooted: he noticed, too, that the boy uprooted them carefully: he could at least feel that his making reparation *thus*, did do his nephew credit.

Some one else was gazing at the sight, as well as blinding tears would let him; it was in vain that George Forrest had entreated Launcelot not to give him *all* his best plants, any scrubs would do—or nothing, he would much rather have nothing; but Launcelot only thrust him away with unintelligible words, and continued his task. "Oh," thought poor George bitterly, again and again, "why was I such a coward as not to prevent this?"

He, too, had thought that he could stand it no longer, and had gone out of the gate ; but he got no further, and, leaning his arms upon the posts, had been watching, with a painful fascination, each of his fellow-pupil's movements. He was still in this position, thinking of nothing but how he should ever hereafter *hate* his garden, when Mr. Franklyn said, "Let me pass, please."

Seldom had he spoken more sternly and curtly ; but instead of his usual instant obedience, George cried, almost joyfully, "Oh, Sir ! I am so glad you are come back ! Saunderson need not give me any more flowers, need he ?"

"He must repair the damage he has done," said Mr. Franklyn calmly.

"Then I shall always hate my garden ! I—I can't bear it," and even fear of Mr. Franklyn could not prevent actual sobs from breaking forth at length.

"It is a pity to look on, needlessly, at what gives you so much pain : you had better go into the house. Go into the house !" repeated Mr. Franklyn peremptorily, finding that his suggestion was not acted on.

George Forrest fled before those tones ; and if the only actual difference was that he thenceforward gazed furtively from an attic window, instead

of over a gate, at least Mr. Franklyn had not the irritation of the consciousness of a fellow-gazer. But he had not yet got rid of petitioners. Mary, so soon as she had caught sight of him, ran towards him, to say earnestly, "Father, may not Launcelot take some of the flowers for George out of my garden instead of his own?"

"No, my little girl; but perhaps he has taken enough already."

"Not quite; he says his nasturtiums and cabbage-rose tree must go too. May he take mine instead?"

"I—— I wish, Mary, you would not ask such questions: you know that I must say 'No,'" he added, more gently.

"I thought, perhaps, you could say 'yes,' father. May I go and help him to finish planting them?"

"Yes, run along," said Mr. Franklyn hastily; and then walked on into the house, wondering when the boy would come in, and could be sent to the bed which he must so much need. Surely he was needlessly long over this unpalatable gardening. And then, marvelling how he could have let such a little matter for two whole hours distress him, Mr. Franklyn locked himself in his room, and took himself to preparation for the next Sunday morning's sermon.

CHAPTER V.

A CHILD'S SACRIFICE.

"**L**ANCY, are you ready?" said a little maiden of nine years old, opening the study door, after her clear, quiet knock, to find Launcelot Saunderson looking perplexed over his Greek, at an hour on which, on Saturdays, he was usually his own master for the rest of the day.

"Not quite, Mary," he answered, looking up to turn a pleasant, broad-browed face towards the trim, erect, brown-frocked, business-like figure in the door-way; "can you wait—I had better say half an hour? I dare say I shall *not* have done it till half-past three."

"What is it, Lancy?" asked Mary, advancing to the table at which her cousin was sitting.

"Plato: he is too much for me, Polly," said the boy, now almost a young man, of sixteen, with a comical, somewhat weary smile; "but I think that now I am beginning to get at his meaning:

„ if you will wait half an hour, I shall be ready
to blow for you.”

“ Thank you, I will ask mother to let me take the broth to Mrs. Johnstone’s first,”—a permission which Mrs. Franklyn readily gave; but when Mary returned, and the clock had struck the half-hour, no Launcelot had appeared.

“ I thought I should have found you at the church, Mary,” said Mr. Franklyn, entering the arbour not many minutes later. “ Have you had our practice?”

“ No, father; I am waiting for Launcelot to blow for me.”

“ Where is he?”

“ Still in the study. He thought he should be ready at half-past three.”

“ It is twenty minutes to four already, you had better not waste any more time for him, Mary: you can have Freddy Stone, as usual.”

“ Yes, father. Only Lancy likes blowing for me; and I always like Saturdays so much, because he goes with me to the church.”

“ Done at last, Polly!” cried a good-tempered voice, as its owner flew up the stairs. “ I shall be ready in one moment now.”

And in another minute Launcelot looked in, with hair reduced to order, took up Mary’s music-

book, soberly, on finding Mr. Franklyn, as well as his aunt, in the parlour; and presently the two passed the window, talking happily.

"Does Launcelot always go with Mary on his half-holidays?" asked Mr. Franklyn abruptly, as they did so.

"Yes, always: it is very kind of him."

"H'm! I don't know that I altogether like it."

"Because it is Launcelot who does it," said his wife with a smile; "if George Forrest did the same, you would think it a very good-natured action in a great boy towards a little girl."

"One can trust Mary alone in the church; but Launcelot—"

"I am quite sure you can trust him to remember, wherever Mary is concerned, that far more than *your* eye is upon him," observed Mrs. Franklyn earnestly.

"And what can the recreation be of blowing a seraphine for an hour, after having spent two hours over a passage which he would not be made to understand?"

"Could not, perhaps; scholarship is not Lancy's forte."

"Nor attention. I cannot be expected to explain a passage twice over, even to your favourite

Launcelot, when he owns that the first time he was thinking of something else, at the critical part."

"Did he own it? I wonder at his moral courage."

Mr. Franklyn smiled, amused at his wife's pertinacity; and then went on to his study, where he was correcting the morrow's sermon, when Launcelot Saunderson knocked, and entered.

"Everything left about as—" began Mr. Franklyn briefly, to be interrupted by a pleasant, respectful—

"I beg your pardon, Sir; I—I fancied you were gone out for the whole afternoon, and that it would not matter if I left them till Mary's practice was over."

"Whether I were likely to be in or not, the books should have been put away."

"Yes—I beg your pardon," repeated the lad, beginning to arrange papers and put up books at once; but he was interrupted in his work by his uncle's saying, "Let me see what you have done."

With a comical face of disapprobation, Launcelot went to his desk for the paper which he had just put by, and placed it before Mr. Franklyn, with the words, "I thought you would not want it till Monday."

"So it is not finished?" asked Mr. Franklyn, sternly.

"Yes; only I had meant to copy it out fair. I am afraid you will scarcely be able to read it all."

"I am used to bad writing by this time," answered the tutor, with something between a sigh and a smile; and presently his eye having traversed the sheet, he looked up to say, "You are still very backward in Greek."

"I suppose I am," answered Launcelot, feeling such backwardness was not to be attributed to any smallness of the number of weary hours weekly spent in striving to overcome such deficiency.

"I think it would be a good thing to spend an extra hour over it every Wednesday and Saturday;—you are no school-boy now to look on a little extra work as undesirable," added Mr. Franklyn, seeing Launcelot's start of dismay.

"I am very fond of my half-holidays; I don't see why they should be spoilt because I am stupid," said Launcelot, half in sullenness, half from humour.

"Not 'stupid,' ordinarily gifted, and more than ordinarily careless:—however, if I think it best for you to work an extra hour twice a week, there is an end of the matter,—from three to four,—and I will put it to your own good sense to make.

the most of the time. I shall be always ready to help you in any difficulty; but if you choose to waste the time, you may do so;—I shall not look upon the time as part of that of which I am bound to see that you make good use."

This meant that as the time was taken from the lad's play-hours on the plea of his being no longer a boy, he should only be responsible to himself for the effective use made of it. Differently expressed, the concession would have been pleasant, and have made some compensation for what Launcelot Saunderson was still quite boy enough to consider "as very hard usage indeed."

He took back the paper in silence, and put by the remainder of his school-books; then be-took himself to gazing out into the garden, where Mary was making daisy-chains for Victoria and little Mildred; and finally turned round to say, with an effort making his tone quiet, though not so as to entirely conceal his inward resentment,—

"I suppose I may choose my own hours for this extra work?"

"From three to four, I said;—you can take it half an hour earlier if this will suit you better. I cannot have it done later in the day."

"That will be just as bad—I must have from three to four clear."

"I can give you no further choice," said Mr. Franklyn calmly, nevertheless laying down his pen. Such rebellious tones had not met his ears for years.

"Then I won't—I *can't* do the extra work," said Launcelot, correcting himself, and suddenly moderating his voice to add,—

"Surely I may work from four to five instead of from three to four, if it suits me better, Sir?"

"Such an hour would effectually destroy the whole freedom of your half-holiday."

"I do not care for that!—I mean so much as for—"

"For what?" said Mr. Franklyn, as Launcelot suddenly coloured and stopped short.

"For—something else;—surely I may choose my own time?"

"Though I have twice set limits to your choice?" asked Mr. Franklyn quietly; "but I believe I can answer my own question—you do not care so much for the complete spoiling of your holiday as for being compelled to give up going with Mary to the church. Well! it was a very good-natured action of a big boy towards a little girl, as your aunt says; but I would rather that it should be discontinued."

"Why? what possible harm——" began Laun-

celot, perfectly quiet in his extreme astonishment.

"I had rather it should be discontinued : that will be enough for Mary, and it must be enough for yourself. Now I shall be glad to get on with my own work, if you will but go."

"Your own work!" repeated Launcelot passionately, after a moment's silence, during which the storm had been gathering force ; "I wonder how you can sit there quietly, correcting your sermon, and take away the greatest happiness of my life! If you wished me to give up blowing for Mary, why could you not tell me so straightforwardly, instead of giving me extra work just to fill up that very hour?"

"You do not know what you are saying, Launcelot!"

"Perhaps I do not! and no wonder : I put up with every thing because of——;" but once again Launcelot's face flushed with something different from passion, and he ceased speaking.

Mr. Franklyn took up his pen again ; and at that moment came a gentle tap at the window, and an eager, mischievous face strained over the low window-sill, with the words—

"Launcelot ! aren't you coming ?"

"Victoria, I told you not to go and disturb

papa," said a grave, gentle voice behind her; and Mary tried to unloose the fat little fingers from the sill.

"I want Lancy!" cried Victoria vigorously.

"We all want him, but we must wait till he is ready," said Mary quietly; "come back to your daisies."

"I don't care for daisy-chains, I want Lancy," persisted Victoria, who was a young lady by no means to be turned from her purpose, and Charlie's bonnie face now appeared beside her. "Papa! hasn't Lancy done his lessons?"

"Yes, quite," replied Mr. Franklyn, going to the window, and—oh! inconsistent man—lifting the boy in through the window, he took him in his arms.

"Then come!" said Victoria imperiously, who had immediately clambered in after her brother, making nought of her father's with-staying gesture but turning to Launcelot; catching sight of the expression of whose face, she released herself from his uncle, to run up to him, seize his hands and say, "Have you been naughty?"

"I suppose so," he answered with a smile.

"And that has kept you so long. How tiresome of you to be naughty when I want you! You must come now." And Victoria, without

giving her prisoner an option in the matter, led him to the door, opened it, and carried him off to Mildred in triumph, Charlie following them.

“He had been naughty, so he could not come,” she said complacently; “it is so tiresome of him to be naughty on half-holidays! Now, Lancy, make me a great long, long chain, as you did on Wednesday, and Charlie and Milly shall get you the daisies.”

“And you too, Ora; I won’t work if you are idle.”

“I’m tired,” said Victoria, sitting down and fanning herself with her sun-bonnet.

“So am I,” said Launcelot, paying no regard to the basket of daisies which she placed upon his knees, and gazing up into the clear summer sky.

“Oh! do begin, Lancy, it will be teatime soon,” pleaded Victoria, at length.

“Not till you go and help Milly to gather more, these are not nearly enough.”

“Mary, you can go and help her; I’m tired of gathering them.”

“So is Mary; Mary, don’t go. Now, Ora!” cried the lad, suddenly rising and catching the child up in his arms unawares, “don’t be such a lazy little monkey.” And he ran across the lawn, Victoria screaming with excitement and delight,

and deposited her beside her brother and sister, saying imperatively, “There! if you dare come to me before your basket is *full*, I shall not put a daisy in your chain to-night,” with which threat he was gone; and seating himself beside his eldest cousin, said, “What a little tease she is !”

“She is so little.”

“*You* were *never* in the way. Well, I suppose I must begin this chain. Mary, I shall never be able to blow for you again.”

“Oh, Lancy !”

“No ; do you mind ?”

“Oh, Launcelot, yes !” answered the girl, stealing so close to him, that the boy could not resist putting his arm round her and drawing her closer still ; “but why ?”

“Because your father would rather not. I know no other reason.”

“What can we have done ?” asked Mary in amaze, her eyes full of thought as she ran through, mentally, every childish sin of omission or commission.

“Done ! nothing but been too happy. I mean *you* have done nothing wrong, dear, don’t think it,” added Launcelot eagerly, ashamed of the bitterly insinuating tone which had caused Mary to turn on him such a wondering and uncomprehending gaze.

"And you—but I know you would not mean it."

"No, I do not think that Mr. Franklyn means it as a punishment, even to me, who deserve more than I get, I dare say," added Launcelot, with the comical smile which, when used on occasions like this, made Mary put her compact brown fingers on his lips, and say,—

"Don't, Lancy."

"No; but you *did* like my going with you?"

"Yes, so much; I always looked forward to Wednesdays and Saturdays."

"Henceforward I shall be at Greek whilst you you are practising: if I am not to go with you I shall choose *exactly* the same time, and then, Mary, we must get rid of these children and enjoy ourselves together in some other way afterwards."

"On Wednesdays, perhaps; on Saturdays I must always look after them because nurse is busy."

"How are you getting on with my chain?" asked saucy voice suddenly behind them: "basket full!" and Victoria dropped down the basket relentlessly on the heap of previously gathered flowers, and screamed with delight when Launcelot, upon emptying it of its contents, discovered her device of having only laid a sprinkling of daisies over a deep layer of grass from the hayfield.

"Oh, Victoria ! that is very naughty," began Mary, much distressed at such duplicity.

But her words were unheeded, for Launcelot caught up the child, saying, "I'll punish her, Mary," carried her off to the hayfield, smothered her in a great haycock, called Milly and Charlie to assist in her burial, and talked and laughed so much during the fighting, coquetry, and merriment that followed, that when all were called in to tea, and Mary (somewhat perturbed at Launcelot's having made a joke of Victoria's delinquency) had taken her three charges to be made neat for the meal, he could walk straight into the study, advance to Mr. Franklyn, and, though crimson with the effort and its shame, say frankly, "I am very sorry, Sir, that I said what I did ; but I was so very much disappointed, I really did not know what I was saying."

"And if at sixteen you still let passion make you unconscious of the folly or wickedness of what you are saying, when do you mean to set yourself to work to get the better of these terrible outbreaks?"

"Indeed, Sir, I *am* at work ; but—I don't think you can know, Sir, how hard it is !" added Launcelot, suddenly raising his eyes to his uncle's. "I know how very improperly I spoke this afternoon ;

I am quite ready to prove that I am by submitting to——”

“ You are too old to be punished for such outbreaks now ; for five years I have been trying to cure you of them without much success, I fear,” added Mr. Franklyn, with a sad smile, “ so I am the more willing to see what you can do for yourself—God’s grace preventing you ;” and, after a moment’s pause, he wiped his pen, rose, and left the room ; whilst Launcelot, thus repulsed, leant his head upon his hand, with an unwelcome sensation of choking in his throat to which he had long been a stranger.

“ He does not remember that *once* it would have been days, instead of half an hour, before I could have felt grieved for having spoken immoderately under such unprovoked provocation ! Still, I wonder why I care for every hard word from him, as I do, when he is *always* so hard on me ; whilst to little Forrest—pooh ! Forrest never gives him the trouble I do ; and why should he not treat me as he thinks best ? I wonder whether, when he is my father-in-law——here I am, forgetting about my sin ; and as he leaves me to look after myself, I must *make* myself remember it. What can I do ? Resolve to work as hard at this extra work as if I did not hate it, as I do—I can’t see any good

in Greek, except for getting one into difficulties. No, none at all. Even Polly cried once over her Greek ; even she was blamed for carelessness when she could not understand. I don't care how much he scolds me, how cutting he is, if he only does not blame her!—here I am again quite away from this afternoon's disrespectful speaking, and uncle being a clergyman makes it specially wicked. 'Honour and obey all who are put in authority over you.' I will put that answer of the Catechism into Greek for a punishment to myself," and here the tea-bell rang, and Forrest and Reynart looked in on their return from Huntingdon ; the former to say,—“ You don't mean that Greek has kept you in all the afternoon, Launcelot?” and was answered, “ No ; but what do you think of my having to give an hour to the stupid thing every half-holiday henceforth ?”

“ No, you don't mean it !” said Claude Reynart, the pride of Mr. Franklyn's heart—no one dared to say, or even think, his favourite.

“ Well, I am glad that you, who are such an out-and-out Franklynian, think it hard ; I do !” and Launcelot sighed ; “ but there—I 'd just been resolving to take it cheerfully !”

“ Polly, come up to me when we come in,” said Launcelot, half an hour later, as he and Forrest

went out together ; and less than two hours later Launcelot was busy at his self-imposed task, finding astonishingly little hardship in it, whilst Mary was by his side, and her head and hands busy in his service. When half-past eight struck, and she kissed him and said good night and was gone, it was quite another thing ; and only the conscientiousness which Mr. Franklyn had succeeded in raising to the sure ground of principle, instead of impulsive instinct, enabled him to keep on at his work till it was completed, copied out fair and legibly, and then burnt, with the mental comment—“ It is very stupid work doing a thing one has set oneself. I should like Mr. Franklyn to have seen that concern, it was a pattern of neatness ; I don’t think even he could find fault with it : to be sure, there may have been heaps of mistakes of which I know nothing ; so it is best as it is, after all ! ”

Meanwhile, when Mary had come in to say good night, Mr. Franklyn had kept her hand in his, to say, “ I have arranged for Freddy Stone always to blow for you.”

“ Yes, father.”

“ I was afraid you might be sorry, dear,” said Mr. Franklyn kindly, surprised by such immediate and unquestioning submission, even from his obedient, well-trained Mary.

"Oh yes, father, I am ; but Launcelot said you had rather that he did not come any more."

"Good night, my little darling!"

"Good night, father!" and then Mary walked upstairs, and put herself to bed ; winking away the tears that would gather in her eyes, and mentally repeating diligently, to drive away sorrowful and repining thoughts that might otherwise have brought the tears further than the dark eyelashes :—

"If, on our daily course, our mind
Is set to hallow all we find,
New treasures, still, of countless price,
God will provide for sacrifice."

"You have really put an end to Launcelot's blowing for her?" said Mrs. Franklyn, when her little girl was gone.

"Yes, it is undesirable in many ways."

"It always seemed to me such a kind, unselfish way of spending an hour of his holidays."

"It is more natural for a boy of sixteen to be otherwise amusing himself."

"Poor boy, he will take it very much to heart!"

"Yes, he has taken it to heart, if that means being more impertinent towards me than before."

"It must be so hard to see any reason!"

"Why can he not take the goodness of my reasons on trust, as Mary does?"

“ Good little Mary !”

“ Yes. We shall have more trouble with Victoria ; *das kleine Mütterchen* stands alone in goodness and in knowledge too ; she knew more at three than Victoria does at four, far more !”

“ Yes.”

Mrs. Franklyn sighed, then looked up to smile, and say, “ Come, Charles, tell me why you ‘ would rather ’ that Launcelot and Mary should henceforth be cut off from one of their greatest pleasures.”

“ Shall I ? No ; a secret is no secret if shared even with one’s wife ; and, Maggie, don’t fret yourself about it, Launcelot himself submits, now, with a good grace.”

“ To what would he not submit from you, Charles ? I wonder whether you ever will succeed in estranging him !”

“ A spaniel, a wife, and a walnut-tree,
The more you beat them——”

“ The *fonder* they be,” interposed Mrs. Franklyn ; “ yea, I can answer for the wife ; and for the spaniel, if poor Launcelot is to be taken as such——”

Poor Launcelot’s merry whistle was at that moment heard on the stairs, and made the epithet appear so inappropriate, that, once more, Mr. Franklyn carried off the victory.

got, like many another before him, how aggravating calmness had been to himself when in a passion. “One minute, Mary ;” and he was running into the house, when Victoria caught hold of his legs, and as he pertinaciously hopped on his free leg, she followed his course, changing incipient tears into laughter.

Mrs. Franklyn’s motherly greetings were soon given, and then Launcelot said, ‘Come, Ora, you must unloose me. Mary is half-way across the churchyard.’

“ You are going to blow for her ?”

“ Yes ; by permission ; thanks to the good-conduct cup—eh, aunt ?”

“ To your own impudence !” replied Mrs. Franklyn, stroking his cheek. “ Come, Ora, let Launcelet go.”

“ No.”

“ You must, Victoria ; I mean what I say,” and then the child of eight loosed her hold, to say passionately—

“ I hate you, Launcelot !”

“ Thank you, cousin Victoria,” said Launcelot with a laugh ; and was gone, to be met by Mary’s gentle—“ Don’t you think, Lancy, that you had better make the children’s mill to-day, and blow for me on Monday ?”

"No, I do not think so at all," answered Launcelot, laying hands on her music-books.

"I would rather, please," said Mary.

"You would rather give up every pleasure to please any of those—ah, we are in a church. But, seriously, I am of your father's opinion, that one's 'No' to a child should be 'No!' A good thing for Miss Victoria that he was out of the way just now!"

So Mary was persuaded, and began to play. She had very much improved since Launcelot had last heard her, twelve months ago; the compact hand could now stretch an octave, and the growth of mind, as well as of fingers, was audible in the increased strength and sweetness of her touch. Launcelot was startled by her suddenly saying gently, "I have done now, thank you, Launcelot; I was only to be half an hour today."

"Play that little bit again, Mary."

"I must not keep father, he will be ready for my Homer; and I shall play it in church to-morrow, you will hear it then;" and she closed book and instrument, and not till they were again in the churchyard added, "Is not the music in Cambridge beautiful?"

"Yes, at King's and Trinity."

"Father has promised to take me there some day. I should so like to play on an organ!"

"And so you shall some day, Mary. Next year, you know, I shall be one-and-twenty, and have much more money to spend as I like. I should like to give Bayfield a present,—perhaps an organ."

"Oh, father would like it so much!"

"And you?"

"How I shall long for it! I must practise harder than ever." Then, as the young man put his hand on her shoulder, the better to look into the face of one for twelve months unseen,—and twelve months develops and erases so much in girlhood,—she added, "What, Lancy?"

"Nothing, only that you are the same *kleines Mütterchen* as I left you; that's all! Hallo, Charlie, what have you to say for yourself?" and he swung the not inopportune intruder on to his shoulder.

"The mill!" shouted Charlie, struggling down from his old favourite position, for which he was, in truth, grown somewhat too big.

"The mill must be left till Monday."

"No, to-day; do come!"

"I yield," said Launcelot, with a shrug; "find Ora!"

But Victoria, who pretended to be thoroughly engrossed with her work when her cousin re-entered the parlour, would not come; he had not made the mill when she had wanted it; now she did not care for it at all.

So Launcelot suffered Charlie to drag him back into the garden, wondering what Mr. Franklyn thought of such a temper. Mary was gone in to him for a Greek lesson, and Charlie and Milly, a plump serious child of six, were his only companions. As time passed on, his stricter notions vanished, and presently he looked up to say, "Charlie, run in and see whether Victoria will not come now."

Presently Charlie came back to say, "Mamma would not let her."

"She could not have understood me," said Launcelot; "don't meddle with the mill whilst I am gone;" and, heated and coat-less as he was, the young man ran into the house to say, "Aunt, I sent in Charlie to see if Ora would not come out now; he must have made some mistake in the message."

"No, I think not; he is a trustworthy little messenger. No, I could not let Victoria come out after her ill-behaviour to you."

"Oh, poor little thing!"

"Yes it is 'poor little thing,'" said Mrs. Franklyn with something of a sigh; "happily, Charlie and Mildred, though not so *good* as Mary, are as good-tempered; but they were all sadly spoilt at Leicester, whilst your uncle was so ill, and have a great deal to unlearn."

"He looks better than I expected, aunt."

"I am glad you can say so; his chest is still weak; we must be very careful for a long time."

"You had a very anxious winter, aunt," said Launcelot, forgetting the mill and his expectant cousins, to sit down beside her.

"Yes, very! I was thankful when the break-down really came, but I had dear Mary to share the nursing; for a long time Charles could not bear the sight of any one but myself or her. You may guess how quietly and well your little 'Polly' did her part."

"Yes; I wish I could have helped you."

"I think your uncle will enjoy having you now; he misses his pupils."

"They come back after Midsummer?"

"So it was settled at Easter; but I think even the Sunday services try his chest too much. Yet there are things still wanting to the parish on which he set his heart; and an organ for the church, for which Mary longs only less than her father."

Launcelot kept his secret here, and further conversation was prevented by Charlie's coming to see "what Lancy *could* be doing."

"You have not seen our new west window," said Mr. Franklyn, as, on leaving the vestry after the next day's afternoon service, he found Launcelot lingering in the churchyard.

"No, nor the font."

"In spite of your share in it? It was a kind thought of my old pupils, and enough to cheer me on Easter Day—the first day I had entered this church for months," and Mr. Franklyn paused; and, though the key was in the church-door, did not turn it, but added, "I have done with pupils for the present year, I fear."

"Aunt Margaret said that after Midsummer—" said Launcelot, with some shyness; he could not yet forget the character of their earlier intercourse; neither could his uncle, even when, as just now, he most wished to do so.

"I had hoped to resume them then,—but it cannot be," added Mr. Franklyn, with the old brevity; "and even if I could take them, I must have given up completing this work," he resumed with gentle gravity, as he opened the low door, and the two gazed in on the fair beauty of the once neglected church. "I have too much forgotten 'he who pro-

videth not for his own household has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.' I sometimes feel, Launcelot, as if it would not be long before there will be a new rector here with fresh zeal and energy to complete God's house, and if so," he added, turning to the young man, who had never in the course of his eleven years' acquaintance with his uncle heard him say so much of self as in these last few minutes, "I look to you to act as a son to my poor wife,—she long acted a mother's part to you."

"Indeed I will do all, everything in my power to prove my gratitude to you both," said Launcelot, under his breath.

"Thank you. The sun is just showing the window to its best advantage," added Mr. Franklyn in a cold quiet tone as the two entered the church.

But more than the evening sun was dazzling Launcelot Saunderson's eyes; still, as of old, he felt rebuked for emotion beside one so calm, and forced himself to appear as completely to have forgotten the tone of the last words which had been spoken, as did their utterer.

When the two returned to the house, tea was ready. Mr. Franklyn could not conceal how that day's two services had exhausted him: and after the meal his wife said gently, "Let Launcelot take

Mary's Greek, and myself hear the children to-night, Charles."

"No, thank you, my dear," he answered with a grateful smile; "it is a pleasure to resume old habits."

And so Mary went to him, and, in the window-seat of the quaint old oriel window, read the lessons for the day, the sun glinting in on her brown hair, and making father and daughter a picture upon which Launcelot could not resist sending many furtive glances,—*furtive*, for he still had the feeling that he *might* be reproved for inattention to the book before him.

No one could accuse Mary of inattention. Her steady eyes never wandered from the page before her, except to seek those of her father in some difficulty. She was not pretty, except in Launcelot's eyes, but trim, and diligent and modest, sweet and grave; much more beauty might have been expected in the daughter of Charles Franklyn, gaunt as this last winter's illness had made his tall figure, thinned as was the dark hair becoming, sharpened the well-cut features. Victoria, of all his children, alone resembled him in refinement and beauty of person; and, he himself knew, in temper also.

She and Charlie were now playing in the garden, frequently coming to the window, where sat their

mother and cousin, to make whispered entreaties to cousin Launcelot to join them ; to which petition Launcelot had always responded, " Not till your catechism is done ;" for he had before him a scene of which he could not take his fill, which no after events have blotted out of his memory. It was ended far too soon to please himself ; though Mary came to his portion of the room, when that which she looked upon as her " Sunday treat " was over, and quietly busied herself in setting down those points on which she had needed special help.

Of a very different order were the younger scholars who followed her, save indeed little Mildred, who stood straight, with her eyes lifted to her father's face, and her hands immovably at her side ; somewhat provoking Launcelot by a resemblance, in such powers of quiet, to *das kleine Mütterchen*, as he first remembered her. It was in vain that he repeated, " Pooh ! Mary was never half so fat, and a great deal cleverer than little Milly."

It was extraordinary to Launcelot, remembering Mary's proficiency in the Church Catechism at Mildred's age, to hear even Victoria confounding the Commandments, and making ordinary children's nonsense of later parts, by which time her attention was very far relaxed. Very gravely, yet pa-

tiently, did Mr. Franklyn recall it; but Victoria took even such correction pettishly; and at length, when some of the sharpness, which Launcelot knew so well, stole unawares into the weakened tones, the child said petulantly, "If you are so cross, papa, I won't say any more. We never did at Leicester; I liked being there much better than here."

Injured as even Launcelot felt by such a speech being addressed to a teacher who had, he well knew, been exercising marvellous patience, he could scarcely help a smile of amusement at Mary's countenance of horror, or at the reflection of this pained astonishment on Mildred's round, plump cheeks. He sufficiently recognized the good effects of sharp discipline in his own case to think that similar treatment would be best for his wilful cousin; but there was only very great gravity in the words, "I shall not let you repeat any more until you are a good girl again. Charlie and Milly will say to the end, and you must stand still and listen."

"I won't listen."

"And then you must go to bed. Now, Charlie."

Victoria stood, one shoulder up, the prettiest picture of sulking that could anywhere be found. When the last words had been repeated, Mildred

said, without quite due pause, "Now, father, you will tell us all about Daniel in the den?"

"Yes, in a minute or two; you should not think of your story quite so soon, Milly;" but he put his hand kindly on the brown head as he spoke. "That's right, Charlie, put by the books. Good night, Victoria!"

"But, papa," said Victoria, suddenly ceasing to be sullen, and assuming the most winning smile, "I did so want to go out with cousin Launcelot. I am sorry I was so naughty."

"You must show your sorrow by behaving properly next Sunday. Good night."

"I won't say good-night to you;" and Victoria walked straight away to her cousin, with a pretty "Good night, Lance, I am so sorry we can't walk together."

"Good night," answered Launcelot, far from sharing her sorrow; and so she went away.

"Now, please, father, the lions!"

"Yes; we will come into the study."

"May not I hear too?" asked Launcelot, with sudden boldness of speech and smile; guessing that, but for him, the story would have been told where father and daughter were.

"If you won't listen," replied Mr. Franklyn, with a smile at his own expense; and he took the

little girl on his knee, and whispered low the story of Daniel in the lions' den. This was another picture upon which Margaret Franklyn often, in later years, looked back with tearful eyes; and which, even at that moment, had a charm for Launcelot Saunderson which provoked him.

"It is so provoking of that child to call him 'father,' and to have just Mary's dear brown hair! How sickness has changed him. I should have liked myself to have boxed the ears of that little vixen Victoria,—horrid child! He would have been too gentle for me now!" And then, the story being over, Mr. Franklyn asked his nephew to come out for a turn, now that the evening was so cool; an invitation which appalled Launcelot as much as it flattered him, until his uncle added, "You'll come too, Maggie?"

"If Mary has done her Greek, and will look after Charlie and Milly."

"Yes, mother—"

"*We* are not going to be naughty, mamma," said Charlie, looking up with a sober, good-humoured gaze, that made Mrs. Franklyn bend down to kiss him. Victoria's words to her father had secretly so hurt her; it was such a comfort that her son was of quite another nature. "I am going to put out Milly's Noah's ark for her."

"And Mary will help you when she has done her Greek?"

"Yes, mother," answered Mary, with her ready cheerful smile. And no one knew how she had been reckoning all day on an evening walk with cousin Launcelot.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LITTLE GRAVE.

“**O**UT of the way, will you? Why, Field!” cried Launcelet Sanderson, some eleven months later; suddenly recognizing in the man whom he had nearly knocked down, in his headlong course up the staircase of his rooms at Muriel, to change his boating-dress in time for chapel, the farmer Field, who, nearly fifteen years ago, had boasted of the frequent whitewashing of Bayfield Church.

“Please, Sir, I’ve a letter for you from the missus.”

“Give it me, quick!” cried Launcelet, struck chill with terror. Yet the letter did not contain what he had first feared, but the words—

“**D**EAR LAUNCELOT,—I know that you will feel so much for us in dear little Mary’s serious illness, that I cannot resist the opportunity of sending you word of it by Farmer Field. She was not well last Sunday; but she did not complain, and we did not think much of it. In the night she

was taken very ill; and the first thing yesterday morning we sent for Mr. Clement; he says it is fever, the low kind that we so often have in Bayfield, that it is a serious attack, but that he sees no reason why she should not struggle through it. Your uncle blames me for being so ready to expect the worst; but I can tell you what I cannot tell him, that I have always had the feeling that Mary was literally too good to live, that God would take her to himself before the wickedness and pain of this world had more nearly touched her; and—this is what I could far less say to your uncle—Mrs. Copeland lost a little girl, but a few months younger than Mary. I don't know why I should have been so eager to trouble you with our trouble; but almost my first thought was, 'Launcelot will be so sorry for us;' and it was a kind of comfort in itself when Farmer Field came to say he was going to Cambridge, and could he take anything for Master Launcelot? I will write again by any opportunity; and by post, whenever any marked change takes place. She is very quiet, scarcely conscious, seldom speaking. I know if she knew that I were writing to Cambridge she would say, 'Send my love to Lancy.'

"Ever your affectionate aunt,
"MARGARET FRANKLYN."

"It's about little Miss Mary, I reckon," said Farmer Field, when he saw the young man had reached the last line of the letter.

"Yes; do you think she is very ill?"

"Can't tell, Master Launcelot; but if my wife didn't say to me last Sunday that Miss Mary's playing on that organ of yourn was like heaven; and then I said I thought she was 'un that would soon be there; she seemed too good for this world."

"When do you go back to Bayfield?" asked Launcelot suddenly.

"To-night, Sir. Can I take any message for the poor missus? She is sadly cut up; but, says I, 'Don't fret, Ma'am, maybe all will be for the best; and if not, she'll only be saved a rare deal of sorrow and trouble,—bless her!'"

"You go back to-night; when?"

"Six o'clock, Sir."

"Then I'll go with you, I'll be at the—."

"But, lor', Sir, I've nothing but the little old—"

"Never mind, if I'm not there at the minute, wait; I shall have to get leave; and every one is in chapel that is wanted—but I *will* get leave!" And Launcelot did get leave; and, at ten o'clock of that June evening, drove into Bayfield.

"Go up to the house, Field, and ask how she is," he said, when they drew near the rectory.

Good Farmer Field alighted and went. It seemed to Launcelot that he was a very long time gone; when he did come back it was with the tidings, "Worse, Sir, much worse, Sir; they scarce think she can live through the night."

"Thank you," cried Launcelot, springing out of the gig, and disappearing in the darkening twilight.

Farmer Field stood where he was, some minutes, pondering on Master Launcelot having always been "such a quick 'un at doing things," then remounted his gig and went slowly home.

Launcelot reached the rectory door, it was open; he entered; all was silent and deserted; he went softly up the stairs to see a dark boyish figure against the slight light still coming through the window. "Charlie!" he said gently.

"No; Michael Forrest."

"You—Forrest? where's Mr. Franklyn?"

"In with her."

"And she?"

But Launcelot was interrupted by feeling a pair of arms flung round him; and heard Victoria cry joyfully, "Oh, Lancy!"

"Hush!" said Launcelot gravely; but that eager cry of delight had already brought Mr. Franklyn out of Mary's room to say, "Victoria, I told you to stay downstairs."

“ Michael was here, papa, and I was so lonely I came up to him ; and now Lance is here—”

“ No ! ”

“ Yes, uncle, I am here. I could not keep away.”

“ Poor boy, what good can you do us ? ”

“ I shall only be in the way ; I will go back to-night, if you will only let me see her.”

“ You may see her. She is unconscious ; it is extremely unlikely that she will recover consciousness ;” and with these brief sentences of preparation, Mr. Franklyn admitted his nephew into the sick room, not remembering, till afterwards, the surprise that such a sudden appearance might give his wife.

But it was no surprise to Mrs. Franklyn to see Launcelot Saunderson, although she had never thought of his coming. She rose now from her watch, beckoned him to the bedside ; turned down the sheet, gently, a little lower, and let him gaze his fill at the sorry, but scarcely painful sight ; calm and placid lay little Mary, even now.

It was long ere Launcelot had gazed his fill ; then he remembered his promise, and what could he be but in the way ? No one knew his secret, the long joy of ten long years,—least of all *das leine Mütterchen* herself ; and so he leant over

the sick child, gently kissed her forehead, and thus looked his last on Mary Franklyn.

Five days later, all was over : he himself had been one of the mourners at her grave, just under the eastern window. Her clothing had been folded up and put away, her books and few treasures locked into a cupboard in Mr. Franklyn's study ; amongst them was many a gift of Launcelot Saunderson's ; amongst them was a treasure on which he had set his heart—her worn Greek Testament. Her organ—"Mr. Saunderson's" the villagers called it, "Mary's" does Mr. Saunderson himself—was, the next Sunday, silent. She had possessed her long-desired pleasure just seven weeks ; and on one of those seven Sundays of possession, Launcelot Saunderson had sat beside her, turning over the pages, drawing and withdrawing stops to which her young hands were still unused.

The funeral was on Saturday. Launcelot stayed over the Sunday ; "It will be a comfort to your uncle," had said Mrs. Franklyn, amid her tears, but her husband had said nought. He took the whole of the two services,—help is hard to get in a country village ; and perhaps he would not have been burdened with it, had it been within easy reach. After the afternoon service, he walked straight home, and locked himself into his own room.

No audible mention had been made of Mary's name; but the absence of all music had spoken more eloquently than memorial words could have done. Tears had rained down many a face, young as well as old, when Mr. Franklyn had repeated, without pause, in the morning service—

“ Oh, come, let us sing unto the Lord ; let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.”

The chief musician of Bayfield Church was lying but thirty feet from the heart-stricken man as the words were said.

Nay, even old Farmer Field thought more truly, when, on leaving the church, he touched Mrs. Franklyn's arm to whisper—

“ Don't fret, missus, don't fret ! she's been singing to a golden harp these four days ! ”

Where the spirit of Mary Franklyn *was*, we know not ; because it has not been God's will that we should know certainly of such matters. It may be, that Launcelot Saunderson *was* right in his feeling that henceforth she *was* ever near him, and all whom she had loved on earth ; that she *was* added to “the crowd of witnesses,” and would be the most glad of all Christ's redeemed ones to welcome his own arrival to the presence of his *Lord*.

And to have no one who knew what the death of this girl of thirteen years and ten months really

was to him ; he could never now make it known. Yet one did know it, and if that one could but have—would but have—stretched out a helping hand to the nephew whose sorrow was, though he could not believe it, more bitter than his own. But Mr. Franklyn, less than Launcelot, could lay bare his heart to the gaze of others. He shrank from Launcelot Saunderson more than any other old companion, because instinct told him that on them twain this blow had fallen most heavily. He had seen Launcelot's eyes follow him as he had the previous day collected one after another of the scattered tokens of Mary's past existence, and he had given him nought. Once their eyes had met, and Mr. Franklyn had finished his work but the more quickly, and when safe beyond their sight had cried, as he had done again and again that day, for help and patience, for that cheerful resignation to a Father's will, when as now inexplicable, which he had so often claimed, had never failed to meet with, from his little Mary.

Still the lad's wistful gaze, as that of a dumb animal, silently beseeching the help and sympathy he could not otherwise ask, haunted him. "Poor fellow. But why, why now first speak to him on a matter which it has been my aim for years—and he will soon forget her. He is young, and

young men are so fickle. Forget her ! Yes; she will be forgotten ; oh, God help me !” and then Mr. Franklyn covered his face and prayed long, tears gathering in his eyes.

If Launcelot Saunderson—who at that very moment was without that door struggling for courage to ask him, who had first shown him the way of life, to guide him now in this terrible strait—had but then entered, he would have learnt more truly the way that Mary’s father was taking through this valley of affliction than he ever knew it for long years. He knocked faintly, but Mr. Franklyn did not hear him. He had his hand upon the door, but a movement on the stairs frightened him from his post of watching. “ After all, I could not have told him,” he thought ; “ I know he would never have thought me worthy of her. He does not murmur ; I will not murmur. No, though he has far fewer years to pass without her than I can have, I *will not* murmur !”

Nor did he ; his aunt was almost pained by his calmness. She did not know what he was really undergoing, any more than Launcelot knew the broken, humble spirit which was, in reality, pervading his fellow-mourner. Little did he guess that it was at his uncle’s suggestion,—that look of dumb entreaty still haunting him, the painful doubt arising

again and again within him that he was now shrinking from his duty ; a doubt forced back with the entreating confession, "O God, I cannot speak of her, not yet"—that, that night, his aunt gave him a lock of Mary's hair. If he had known it, and it was but that Mrs. Franklyn's heart was too full for words that he did not know it, even yet the tone of his future manhood, his upright, God-fearing, unmurmuring manhood, might have been softened into deeper beauty than even little Mary herself had imagined ever existing upon earth.

CHAPTER VIII.

VICTORIA'S WOOING.

“PAST!” cried an exultant youthful voice, suddenly appearing before Victoria Franklyn as she sat in the old rectory parlour, reading, one Monday morning of June, 1857.

“Why, Michael!”

“Didn’t I give you a start now, Miss Franklyn?” said the ex-pupil, bending a pleasant face somewhat close to her own, and smiling a genial, triumphant smile, that became the rather wide mouth well, so white and even were the teeth thus displayed, and very sweet-toned the slight Irish brogue that issued from it.

“I was certainly surprised to see you,” answered Victoria, coldly, but with a flushed cheek.

“Agreeably surprised? Come now! own the truth.”

“You know, Mr. Forrest, that we are always glad to see you.”

“Well! that’s a comfort; it would have been

hard to have walked twelve miles for the pleasure of seeing you again, and you not appreciated the favour. Where's my master?"

"Papa and mamma have driven in to Huntingdon. I am expecting them back, every minute."

"You are! And I must be back in Huntingdon to-night,—and in town to-morrow,—off to India within a month. Well,"—and he sat down beside her with what would have been some impudence of gesture, in any one but himself; "you must know pretty well what I'm come for, Miss Franklyn."

"To bid us all 'good bye!' We shall be sorry to lose you," said the young lady of nineteen to the big boy of twenty.

"You will? 'Tis but small crumbs of comfort you're giving me, Victoria! Well, if you can't guess what I'm come for, I'll just tell you myself." Nevertheless, instead of telling his true errand to the beautiful girl beside him, he began playing with her little dog. Victoria did not rally him on this sudden forgetfulness or embarrassment; but sat very still, awaiting his own time. He glanced once at the figure before him; Victoria was a beauty, "and no mistake!" as he thought, in those awkward moments, for the hundredth time. Her soft, dark hair—far darker than would ever have been that of *das kleine Mütterchen*—was put

back across her ears, and coiled round the back of a remarkably small and pretty head ; her eyes were blue, her complexion transparently white and pink, her figure tall, slight, and pliable. She was dressed quietly but fashionably ; and as she sat there, quietly awaiting further speech, she might have been a princess giving audience to an embassy.

“ So you won’t help me ! ” he said at length. “ I know I’ve only come to knock my head against a wall, but having come thirty miles to do it, I should be a fool if I went back leaving it undone. There, there’s no good being shamefaced about it,— I can’t go to India without you, and there’s an end of it ! ”

Victoria slightly smiled ; but Michael Forrest — a cousin of our old friend George, and heir to a childless baronet grand-uncle — knew her well enough to gather most unexpected encouragement from this small quantity of scorn. He knew well how withering Miss Franklyn’s scorn could be, though unspoken.

“ Well, Victoria,” he resumed, in a soft, winning voice, as he leant over her once more, “ will you come ? ”

“ What will Sir Michael say to, what he will consider, such an absurd proposition ? ”

“ Do you think it absurd ? ”

"Michael, do you mean it?" she asked, turning her eyes full on him, and reading him through and through.

"Indeed I do," he answered; and, having read him through and through, had he remained speechless, she would yet have answered as she did, "I will come."

"It seems too good to be true," said the young man simply; "here have I been making myself miserable, thinking you'd just treat me as I've seen you treat hundreds of men before me."

"No one like yourself, Michael!"

"No! Mr. Franklyn will think me about the most impudent fellow going. We shall just be able to get along comfortably, I reckon, until old Sir Michael dies; and then my pretty one," added the young man, stroking, with ineffable love and tenderness, the smooth soft hair, which hitherto he had only admired at a very far off distance, "will be 'my lady,' and as fine a one as she likes."

"It will be enough to be your wife!"

"No; will it? But you'll be used to that long before old Sir Michael's dead, I hope; and then 'my lady' will be a pleasant variety to you; and I shall be tired of India, and glad to come back to dear old England; how I could have left it, if you had not been so good as you have been, I don't

know. Ah, there's my master! It will be worse than going up to him, five years ago, with an ill-prepared lesson, I declare!"

Mr. Forrest's appearance excited more surprise and less pleasure than was quite flattering; but he took his quiet welcome in good part, and soon won warmer words from those who would have been heartily glad to see him, had they not been beginning to open their eyes to the fact, that his attachment to their elder daughter was not merely that of a big boy to the prettiest girl of his acquaintance.

"And when do you really sail?" asked Mr. Franklyn, as the young man followed him to the parlour, whilst Victoria went upstairs with her mother and sister.

"In three weeks."

"Shall you have any acquaintances as fellow-passengers?" asked the former tutor, much relieved to find that in one-and-twenty days Michael Forrest would be so safely and entirely out of the way, "ready to lose his heart to the first pretty girl in Bombay," was his mental addition.

"I hope to have some one far dearer than any acquaintance with me," answered Michael, making the plunge desperately, with an impudent smile and heightened colour.

"Indeed!" There was no mistaking the nature of this companionship; but, even amid his own relief, Mr. Franklyn was disappointed at such rapid fickleness of fancy.

"Yes, she has promised me to go with me," said Michael with swimming eyes and much tenderness in his tone; "I know I have, at present, only bare comfort to offer your daughter, Sir," he added, in a straightforward business-like tone, "but before we are old enough to care for luxuries, I—I—" it was terrible work to struggle on under that stern gaze of amazed displeasure, "I have every reason to expect to be in a position to gratify her in every possible wish."

"My daughter has, you say, consented to this arrangement?"

"Yes, I knew—"

"And what does Sir Michael say to it?"

"I must break it to him as well as I can."

"And your mother?"

"She loves Victoria already."

"Miss Franklyn is a minor as well as yourself. I do not give my sanction to your immediate marriage in any case, nor to any engagement of any kind, unless it be formed with the full consent of your own guardians and family. I do not say that I shall give it, even then."

“Oh ! Mr. Franklyn—”

“Look you, Forrest ! You have done an unwarrantable action in coming down unawares, taking my daughter off her guard, and entangling her into an engagement without any reference to myself. I am now much less inclined to trust the happiness of any one I love into your keeping than I should have been only an hour ago.”

“What ! Would you have had me go through all I’ve gone through now in telling you of my love—and perhaps for nothing ? I can tell you I never thought she’d ever condescend to put up with me—and that’s the truth of it ; and where would have been the good of letting you and all my family know I was breaking my heart because a woman had said ‘No’ to me ?”

“It would take a good deal to break your heart, Michael,” said Mr. Franklyn, with a not unkindly smile.

“Or you would have done it long ago, Sir ; faith, you would !”

“Don’t rush off into Irishisms, Michael. Where do you return to-night ?”

“To my mother’s at Huntingdon—if you don’t offer me a bed here.”

“No ; I shall do nothing of the kind. How long shall you be at Huntingdon ?”

"I scarcely think you will eventually find it so, Michael," said Mr. Franklyn sternly; "unfair advantage seldom answers even in this world of good and evil; and as this is the tone you think fit to take, I must wish you good-bye at once; if you have anything further to say, you can write it. If we do not meet again, I wish you every success in your Indian career."

"And it's so you'd send off one who has spent the eight happiest years of his life under your roof,—without so much as a cup of tea or a 'God bless you!' Good-bye, and—may you live to repent it." And so Michael Forrest flung himself out of the rectory in a rage.

Victoria ran after him; and positively, not only in the sight of Mildred and her father, but of Fred Stokes, the rectory man, and of Mrs. Field, the churchwarden's wife, these two exchanged their last farewells and their first kiss.

Mr. Franklyn remained speechless with astonishment and shame. Victoria returned to the parlour, thankful to have been able thus to show her colours in the face of the whole world. Her father and mother hoped that ten years of gentle, firm, consistent training had turned her into a high-principled, if a high-spirited, young woman;

but, at the first strong provocation, the high spirit broke through all artificial barriers.

Three days later came a letter from Michael Forrest, dated from London. “ He had been to the ‘Old Forest :’ he had told Sir Michael that he was engaged to Miss Franklyn, and meant to marry her before he sailed on June 20th. Sir Michael had cursed and sworn, but what did that do more than show him, better than ever, that he was an old reprobate, whose opinion was worth less than nothing ? He knew he’d give anything to be able to cut off the entail, but he could not ; he could cut off his allowance, though, and that he had vowed he would do, unless he would break off his engagement at once. Break it off ! Not he ! The allowance might go, and be hanged to it ; though this withdrawal would prevent his being able to marry Miss Franklyn till he had got his promotion, which he would slave for like an Egyptian. He would be in Huntingdon to-morrow again, and would come over at once to see Victoria.” Such was the concluding sentence of this outburst.

Mr. Franklyn, immediately on its arrival, rode over to Huntingdon to obtain an interview with Mrs. Forrest. She was a warm-hearted, low-born Irishwoman ; and,—the bloom of that beauty for

which Captain Forrest had married her one-and-twenty years ago having been long past;—one whom Sir Michael and Lady Forrest might well be excused from wishing to introduce at the Old Forest; one whose marriage with their nephew they would never in any way have recognized, had not the death of their own son, childless, suddenly converted the fatherless grandson of Sir Michael's next brother into the heir of their name and property.

The little Michael, a boy of ten, had been invited to the Old Forest; he was a bold, amusing little fellow, full of Irishisms of speech and manner, which jarred on his English relations not a little: still they liked the boy. He must be sent somewhere, where he could be tamed and civilized, and cured of that terrible brogue. George Forrest, a favourite nephew, the son of Sir Michael's third brother, and a friend of their lost son, was eager that he should be sent to his own old tutor, Mr. Franklyn. Mr. Franklyn was ready, for George's sake, to undertake the somewhat onerous charge: and so Sir Michael wrote one day to Mrs. Forrest, stating quietly that, instead of sending Michael back to Ireland, he should forthwith send him as a boarder-pupil to the Rev. Charles Franklyn, of Bayfield Rectory, Huntingdon.

It was a grand thing for her poor friendless little Michael to be thus recognized and educated by his English relatives ; but how should she live without a sight of him from year to year ? And so—as soon as Michael, from his allowance and gifts, and she, from her own earnings, had saved enough to defray the expenses of the journey,—Mrs. Forrest came over to England, unknown to Sir Michael, and settled herself in Huntingdon. It was a step that, for a time, made Sir Michael furious, and greatly annoyed Michael's tutor ; and yet he never thought on the continual sacrifices of boyish pleasure which his pupil's share in the step had cost him, without a strong feeling of admiration ; and the recognition that, unsatisfactory and wearying pupil as the ill-trained, uncertain, Irish-bred lad was in many ways, there was yet a very good foundation upon which to work, could he but get at it.

He had at length believed he had got at it, but the letter received that morning was enough to make him doubt it ; and he rode over to Huntingdon, thinking how very often had patience, time, and prayer been wasted on those committed to his care. Fourteen boys he had had in turn under his charge ; on the career of whom, out of this number, could he look with unmixed pleasure ? Their names were few and soon told : Launcelot

Saunderson, George Forrest, two of his first set of pupils, (but then there were Langley and Martin-gale of the same set, on whose career he only looked with pain; and that nice fellow, James Lawrence, how unaccountably had he frittered all his opportunities away, escaping distinction of all good, as well as of all evil!) Claude Reynart,—ah! he would willingly have given Victoria, even a year ago, into such keeping,—and Frank Jones. On Saunderson, the elder Forrest, Reynart, and Jones, could Mr. Franklyn alone dwell with unmixed pleasure, during that summer morning's ride to Huntingdon.

Mrs. Forrest was at home. Yes, Michael had told her all about Miss Franklyn; and she was sure, if Sir Michael and his lady had been willing, she would have been delighted; but when the very bread they ate (Sir Michael had put an immediate end to all *English* school-keeping) came from them, what could she say? They were both young; Michael had found his uncle suffering from gout when he reached the "Old Forest;" a man of seventy-six could not last for ever.

"Bètter, shure, the young people should be patient, and wait quiet till the ould man was gone."

This was a far more rational view than Mr. Franklyn had dared hope from her: but then Mrs.

Forrest had that morning had a stern letter from Sir Michael, forbidding her, under pain of his eternal displeasure towards herself and her son, to do or say anything to encourage him in his present folly; and she had not yet been exposed to the counter-influence of that son.

"She could not consent to an engagement against Sir Michael's wishes, faith she couldn't!" she added, as if Mr. Franklyn, of whom she had ever stood in only less terror than of the unknown Sir Michael, had come to demand her consent upon the spot.

"Neither shall I," said Mr. Franklyn quietly; "and, as matters at present stand, it will be best for all parties that Michael should not again come to Bayfield;" and he delivered into the widow's keeping a note, which he had written to Michael to that purport: and then he took his leave, calling at the post-office on his way through the town, to see if the second post had brought any letters for him.

Yes, one sealed with the Forrest arms, and evidently of importance. It was from Sir Michael, not exactly imputing treachery to himself, on the part of his heir's tutor, but intimating something very like it, and declaring "that if Michael left England engaged to Miss Franklyn, he should

at once cease to make any allowance either to himself or his mother, and leave him no more at his death than the unfortunate entail had put it out of his power to leave elsewhere."

It was an insulting letter; but Mr. Franklyn could read it and refold it with only pitying, and no angry thoughts. He turned into the house of a brother-clergyman, borrowed ink and paper, and wrote back a calm, gentlemanly reply,—saying, that he had no intention of permitting an engagement between his daughter and Michael Forrest; and that no one could regret more than himself such an unfortunate attachment having arisen.

After luncheon with Mr. Berry, he rode home to pass Victoria, to whom he had at once confided the contents of Michael's letter, and the step he himself must take, (he would in all things deal openly by them both,) sitting on the green bank of the churchyard, so lost in thought that she did not see him. He then little thought that she had only just parted from Michael Forrest; and that the secret of her unbroken, even cheerful, bearing throughout the day, lay in his renewed protestations of unbroken and undying attachment.

Thursday morning's post brought another letter to the often letterless Bayfield household: four

years ago, now, a post-office had been established in the village, and thus letters could be daily both received and dispatched. It was from Mrs. Charles Saunderson, the widowed mother of Charles Launcelot, reminding Charles and Margaret of their winter's promise that Victoria and Mildred should pay their long-talked-of visit to Laurel House whilst the Manchester Exhibition was open. It had been opened a month now, and would they not come at once? In another month she should be going to the sea, to the southern coast, and she would bring them back. Launcelot would be returning from town on Saturday, and would escort them down; surely there never could be a better time.

"Better!" Mr. Franklyn glanced at Victoria's drooping head and pale cheek, and, his heart aching with pity, thought, "Never worse; poor child, it will be too early for change to do her good; and yet perhaps she would feel less unsettled beyond twelve miles of Huntingdon. Would that Sir Michael had invited both mother and son to the Old Forest, and thus make her cup less bitter!"

"Oh, father, that will be delightful! We have been so longing to go," said Mildred, who, at sixteen, possessed a comeliness of face and figure, and sober intelligence of mind, not to be despised,

though they frequently were so before the more brilliant gifts of her elder sister.

"Victoria must settle whether she had rather go now than after your aunt's return from the sea; the pictures will be there still, Milly."

"I could not possibly go now," said Victoria in a low voice, that sounded as if its utterer were on the verge of tears.

"Then you shall not go, my love," said her father, so kindly that the tears escaped the previously resolute lids, and trickled down the soft pretty cheeks upon her plate. Was she not now deceiving her kind parent's trust? Why could she not leave Bayfield till after June 20th? Because she could not lose the least chance of another stolen interview with Michael Forrest.

He had sent no answer to Mr. Franklyn's note; but he had said to her, "I shall always be about, all day and every day; it will be hard if we don't meet most days." And, ashamed of herself, Victoria had, the day before, walked first to one, then to the other extremity of Bayfield, but had not met him, and had returned home relieved,—her training had not quite been thrown away,—relieved, yet miserable. And as those tears fell down, she resolved that she would *not* seek him again; if he really loved her, let him come and boldly claim her.

And he did really love her ; and he did come and boldly claim her ; one whole day's useless beating of the bush had been enough for Michael's impetuous temper ; and then Mr. Franklyn learnt how they had met on the previous Tuesday,—Michael having received his prohibition, Victoria knowing that it had been sent. The two young people looked conscience-stricken beneath the sight of that indignant father's amazement at such treatment from those whose upright dealing he had never dreamt of doubting.

“ You drove us to meeting by stealth, Sir,” began Michael, falteringly.

“ Papa, don’t look like that ; I won’t deceive you again, indeed I won’t !” cried Victoria, flinging her arms around his neck.

“ I shall not give you the opportunity, Victoria,” said Mr. Franklyn sternly, unloosing her arms ; “ you shall go away from home,—be taken out of the way of a temptation which I should have thought you were at least too proud to have let come near you. I should have hoped you had been too much of a Christian for it ever to have become one.”

“ Yes ; send me away ; let me go,” cried Victoria, burying her face in her hands and weeping bitterly ; “ I cannot trust myself.”

“ Do you give up our engagement ?” asked Mi-

chael, in his turn, somewhat sternly, as he walked towards her.

"No, no, Michael; I can never do that!" she answered, holding out her hand to him, with somewhat of a smile at the very thought; "papa would not ask me to do that."

"Indeed, Victoria, I demand it," he answered gravely; "that is, I demand that you and Michael Forrest should cease to consider yourselves engaged. *I have never so considered you, nor Sir Michael—*"

"The hard-hearted ould—"

"But I demand that you should cease to hold to your self-imagined engagement."

"Shall cling to it so long as I've a finger to hold on by," said Michael, with grim resolution.

"If Miss Franklyn ceases to hold herself engaged to you, you will scarcely presume to consider yourself engaged to her, I imagine," said Mr. Franklyn frigidly.

"Let her try me! Will you, my pretty one?"

"Victoria, speak, and tell him that it is your own wish to set Mr. Forest free," said the ex-tutor, wishing that he could still have made Michael pay dearly for this impertinent assurance.

"I—I can't, papa; it is *not* my wish to break off our engagement," pleaded Victoria, all dignity

vanishing before her womanhood ; “ but send me away ! I am willing to go. I wish to go. I cannot trust myself whilst I am so near him,” and then all further speech was lost in tears.

“ God bless you !” said Michael, about once more to seize her hand ; but Mr. Franklyn intercepted the gesture with a somewhat rough one of his own. Michael stood still and glared on him one minute, then said bitterly, “ I’ve the pleasure of wishing you good morning, Mr. Franklyn ; but mind, you have not treated me as a gentleman, neither shall I treat you so, and I thank you for releasing me from the obligation. Good morning, sir.”

“ Good morning,” replied the object of his scorn, with quiet courtesy ; and so Michael Forrest took his leave of Bayfield Rectory. And consequently, on Saturday afternoon, Launcelot Saunderson was escorting his two young cousins to his mother’s Lancashire home.

CHAPTER IX.

LAUNCELOT'S MANCHESTER HOME.

MRS. Saunderson's home was in the past, rather than in the present regions of Manchester gentility. It was a substantial red-brick house, with some thirty yards of garden in front, and with nearly a hundred yards behind, bordered by a row of limes, which, having been planted some twenty years, were grown up, so as well to cover the surrounding walls. Victoria Franklyn, as she entered the handsome, old-fashioned hall, and gloomy, yet richly-furnished drawing-room, felt like one who had doomed herself to a living prison.

But she must not appear as a prisoner. Neither aunt Maria nor cousin Launcelot knew her secret trouble; she had entreated her father not to tell them what had occasioned the sudden acceptance of a kind plan at first so decidedly rejected, and he had granted her request—although, as he had also told her, she had little right to expect any

such favour at his hands. Mildred knew more of the source of the pale worn looks, upon which Mrs. Saunderson did not cease to comment, on which cousin Launcelot had so immediately dropped *any* comment, seeing remarks caused pain; but Mildred had a straightforward way of preserving both truth and privacy, which stood her in good stead, under that night's fire of aunt Maria's eager, and not very well-bred questioning.

On the Monday following, the whole party went to the Exhibition; and on Tuesday they went again, and Mildred's plump face kindled to enthusiasm under Launcelot's showing of its beauties; whilst the once enthusiastic and far cleverer Victoria followed languidly in their wake with her aunt, thankful to stay behind with her whilst she sat down to talk to a friend, although the old lady had said, " You go after Launcelot, my dear; I've seen them all this hundred times."

Those friendly talks of Mrs. Saunderson's were the resting times of Victoria's day. But on the third day, as she was thus sitting, she looked up after a long reverie, to meet a pair of eyes, from which she turned at once without exchanging glances, but from which she was conscious of shrinking, throughout the whole of the rest of that long (and with the knowledge, that *he* might at

any moment be very near her) agonizing afternoon.

"My love, you look worse than ever!" said Mrs. Saunderson, when, once more seated opposite to her niece in the carriage, she first thought of noticing her looks.

"Sight-seeing always tires me," said Victoria.

"You and my mother must have a holiday tomorrow, and spend it quietly at home," said Launcelot kindly.

"Thank you," answered Victoria, with a reality of gratitude in her voice, which it did not strike her would be unaccountable to others, until the words, or rather the tones, were beyond control. Mrs. Saunderson looked curious, and half an hour later was saying to Mildred, "It is no good your denying it, child; that girl is in love!"

So the next day, Mr. Saunderson, after luncheon, took Mildred over his cotton mill, by way of *resting* her! whilst Victoria sat in the drawing-room working at the altar cushion of Bayfield Church; Mrs. Saunderson leant back dozing in her arm-chair over the 'Times'; whilst Michael Forrest was going round and round the Exhibition in search of one he could not find. At length Mrs. Saunderson fell asleep, and then Victoria ventured to lay down her work, push back her hair, and heave a sigh that

startled her and made her resume her work in haste ; in terror lest that sigh should have awakened her aunt.

“ You must go *to-day*, my dear Victoria,” said Mrs. Saunderson three days later, “ to see the company. The Exhibition is quite a pretty sight on Saturdays.”

So Victoria went, keeping closer than ever to the side of Mrs. Saunderson, who, this day, met even more friends than usual. The Exhibition was, to most of its visitors on this day, more a lounge and a promenade than anything else ; and Mrs. Saunderson did not fail to introduce to her two charges, the most eligible of those gentlemen of her acquaintance whom she came across. Not a few were much struck by the elegant, simply-dressed stranger, who kept so closely to the side of a *chaperon* whom she helped to make appear more homely than ever ; and one, a cotton factor, who had spent last autumn in the Holy Land, and was this autumn going to the Nile, became so enchanted with her, that for a whole hour he stayed by her side talking in a strain that, astray as was her attention at first, at length won her to interest. But suddenly, on looking up to identify a picture, which Mr. Grant could not believe she had *not* yet noticed, her eyes met those of a human

being, gazing at her like a tiger ; a gaze which, when she had glanced once again, had changed into a gaze of reproach and misery that cut her to the heart.

Could he think she was forgetting him ? Never ! Once more Victoria glanced that way, and in that momentary enchanting smile won back all Michael's trust,—and might well make Mr. Grant marvel what she was about.

" Yes, the picture is a very striking one," said Victoria, suddenly restoring her attention to the gentleman by her side, and doing so with perfect self-possession ; " if Mrs. Saunderson is inclined to go down the nave, I must get a better view of it ; I am too short-sighted to judge of it from a distance."

But when she reached Laurel House, and could be alone, her heart fluttered till she sat down and gasped for breath. " I must go home," she said ; " if I stay here—" And that very night she wrote to her father, to tell him that Michael had appeared at Manchester. But he, riding into Huntingdon the following Monday, to learn his movements from his mother, was assured by her that he had returned from Lancashire, was with her,—had only just gone out into the town ; had he not met him ? —and, consequently, Mr. Franklyn had advised Mildred and Victoria to remain at Manchester some

time longer, which they did, till long after the important 20th of June was passed.

Mildred did not wonder that one night she was awakened by her sister's violent weeping; in the dark, tears trickled silently down her own girlish cheeks, to think that she could not help her, could not comfort her. She only wondered how poor Victoria had kept up so long.

It was towards the middle of July that Mrs. Saunderson brought her two nieces back again. Launcelot had long ago been compelled to own that Victoria Franklyn was a pretty, indeed a beautiful girl, instead of a "horrid child," but he still could not like her. What had she meant by her alternate repulsion and encouragement, and final haughty refusal of poor Grant? Perhaps he had been precipitate; but there was no need to have received his offer as an insult, because he had been foolish enough to suffer her fair face so swiftly to befool him.

"It's my opinion that she is regretting her refusal already," confided Mrs. Saunderson to her brother-in-law, the last evening of her stay at Bayfield; and then followed a history of the visit to Laurel House, which jarred as much upon her auditor as had ever done Maria's stories twenty years back, though he now succeeded in hiding his disgust.

But Mrs. Saunderson left Bayfield unenlightened, and without Victoria, whom she had pressed, with much kindness, to accompany her to the sea ; " sea air would do her good." " And then you can return with me to Manchester, and Mr. Gr——"

But Victoria glared at her with such withering scorn at the very first letters of the name, that the remainder of the monosyllable was never uttered ; and Mrs. Saunderson was much relieved by the decided refusal that followed, as soon as the girl recovered the power of courteous speaking.

" No thank you, aunt, it is very kind of you, but I have seen nothing of Charlie, all this long vacation ; and he will be going off to Scotland as soon as grouse-shooting begins."

" With whom, my dear ? " asked Mrs. Saunderson, careful not to renew her invitation.

" Some college friends of his," said Victoria carelessly, but with slightly heightened colour ; she knew that these friends were of that set against which, last Christmas, her father had warned good-natured easy-going Charlie, and with whom he had then promised to break off all intercourse. He was a good-hearted fellow in spite of all ; yet intercourse had increased instead of slackened, and if this shooting excursion came off, would be tightened still more by the time term began again.

Mr. Franklyn knew that Charlie was going into Scotland with John Reynart. Now John Reynart was a younger brother of Mr. Franklyn's own favourite, Claude, and knowing nothing more, the name sufficed him; and Charlie did not add the names of the party whom they were to join, and Mr. Franklyn did not ask them.

"We must not overdraw the home rein, Maggie; it never answers," he said, with a somewhat sad smile, when his wife had been confiding, in the twilight, that Charlie was somehow changed.

"That seems a low motive, Charles, upon which to ground non-interference," she said, looking into his face with some perplexity.

"My love, our heavenly Father leaves the fate of us each in our own hands, so must we earthly parents be content to do with our children; they *must* choose for themselves whether they will serve God or Baal; we cannot do it for them; or, I think, you and I should have done so, long ago, with Charlie—the child of so many prayers."

"Yes!" and Mrs. Franklyn sighed deeply.

So, on August the 10th, Charles Franklyn travelled up to town "to meet John Reynart," and left the rectory much the sadder for the absence of his kindly, cheerful temper. Victoria, his favourite and devoted sister, had, so long as he had been at

home, striven to be his companion as of old, and, for his sake, preserved exterior cheerfulness; but, as soon as he was gone, she sank back into apathy which was only varied by occasional petulance. For a week her father and mother bore with these varying humours, patiently and in silence. Then he took her gently to task for them, and she meekly acknowledged their selfishness and sinfulness, and promised to try to do better for the future, like a child, and for the succeeding week, not only tried but succeeded.

Then, when Mr. Franklyn came down to breakfast, it was to take from the post-bag, among other letters, one, the audacity of which struck him dumb. It was directed,—

“Miss Franklyn,
“Bayfield Rectory,
“Huntingdon,”

—in a hand which years of acquaintance with Michael Forrest's exercise books had made more familiar to him than that of his own son; for Charles, so soon as old enough for regular tuition, had been sent to Winchester; but, as if it were possible that the hand might not be identified, there was written in the corner, “M. O'C. F.”

Steps were heard approaching. Mr. Franklyn slipped the letter hastily into his pocket, and when

it was scarcely out of his hand, was receiving Victoria's quiet kiss, and hearing her gentle, plaintive words, "No letters, papa?"

"Yes, several," answered Mr. Franklyn, his colour rising, although he was but waiting to tell her of the one which he had put away until breakfast was over, and they could be alone; and when Victoria turned over those still on the breakfast-table, as if with a sudden hope, and then sank back into her gentle listlessness, he wondered could she be hoping against hope for a letter, when he had so expressly forbidden all correspondence until Michael was of age.

The meal was over at length; the pupils of that day, Stock and Carpenter, had turned out to enjoy their half-hour of liberty; and then Mr. Franklyn called Victoria into his study, as she was passing upstairs, to say, as he closed the door, "Sit down, my love!"

"Oh, father! what?" cried the girl, catching at his arm in terror.

"No bodily harm to any one, my dear," he answered, reassuringly; "it is disappointing to myself to find that Michael Forrest attends to no restriction;" and then Mr. Franklyn restrained the hard words upon his tongue, to add, "He has written to you, Victoria, by this mail. I must return the

letter unopened, and must always do so ; but this first time it seemed more upright dealing by yourself to tell you that a letter had arrived for you. Hereafter, should he write again, I shall destroy such letters without again submitting you to such an ordeal, my poor child,"—for Victoria's very lips were white.

"I—I must have the letter," she said at length, feeling with her hand for it as one bewildered to dizziness.

"No, it is no good asking for it. I told him I could allow no correspondence ; I told Sir Michael I should allow none."

"This one letter, father!"

"No, not one."

"He may be ill, he may— Oh, let me have it!" cried Victoria, rising and making as though she would have flung herself at his feet ; but Mr. Franklyn rose, so as to prevent this, and only answered sadly, "Oh, Victoria, if we could but have taught you little Mary's perfect obedience, and perfect trust, that only duty made us pain her,—how much happier a woman would you be!"

"Mary was never tried as I am. He may want me ! He may be dying ; he—"

"My dear, if he were ill, it would have been his mother who would have written to tell us so, not

himself," said Mr. Franklyn curtly, and in a tone beside which Victoria felt rebuked for her own uncontrolled emotion. Presently she said quietly, every word carrying conviction, "I will not ask for the sight of another letter, only let me see this one; you do not know what misery its being sent back *unread* will cost us both!"

"Victoria, you told me that you had ceased to consider yourself engaged to this man, and that he knew it," said Mr. Franklyn, eyeing her keenly; "is it possible you then deceived me?"

"No; our engagement is quite, quite at an end; but—not our love!" cried Victoria, bursting into hysterical sobs which she could no longer master. "Oh, let me see this letter!"

Mr. Franklyn paused. Once more he asked himself, were children teaching him charity or weakness? Perhaps, at length, weakness. "On one solitary condition," he said, after a moment's pause.

"On any."

"That if you read it, so do I. My dear child," he added, aghast at the expression of utter despair, —of resignation, because nothing but resignation remained possible,—with which, as the words were uttered, she drew back her entreating hand from off his arm, "you could not have thought that I

could let you read a letter from Michael Forrest, of the contents of which I myself knew nothing?"

"I had hoped that you might," answered Victoria, meekly and faintly.

"I believe many fathers would have read a letter sent in such insolent defiance of all orders, before returning it. I will not do that."

"Oh, thank you!"

"And henceforth I burn all such letters, without any reference to yourself; it might have been wiser to have done so in the present instance."

"Oh no! it is a comfort to know that he *did* write!"

Then Mr. Franklyn sighed with heaviness of heart at such hankering after a forbidden object, such rejoicing in the ill-doing of him she loved, dwelling after two months of separation,—two months, in which surely principle might have gained the victory over earthly passion,—in a child of his, of his bearing, his training. Where had he failed? for, even after his own words to his wife, he could not see a child of his acting wrongly, without the feeling that some failing of his own should bear most of the blame.

Perhaps Victoria read this self-reproach; for that sigh awakened her to a truer view of her own conduct than had done any of her father's late



words, hard or pitying. She rose, with eager face full of filial love and duty, and had on her lips the exclamation of how truly she knew that the blame of all her evil passions lay with her own negligence of his care and warnings ; when suddenly the flush faded away, and silently, without one word of love or duty, she glided from the room.

Six hours later, when the lessons for the day were over,—when her father had taken Mildred out with him, thinking that to leave his elder daughter in quiet was the truest kindness he could show her,—Victoria could scarcely believe it was herself who had unlocked that father's desk, with very trembling hands it is true, and now, bewildered with shame and fear, was reading, in her own room, the letter of which she had thus obtained possession. “But it *is* my own; he must ever despise me, but in God's sight I *am* justified,” she repeated more than once, during its perusal, as if to gather courage thus to profit by her ill-gotten gains ; and then, after that one hasty perusal, she placed Michael's letter in the envelope directed to him; lying by her side, wrote a few hasty lines in addition, starting at every sound, and trembling at even little Minnie's bark, placed these few lines likewise within the cover, tied on her hat, and ran downstairs, hurried across the green to the village

post-office, dropped the letter into the box, and was safe. The post-office would give up that letter to no one but to the—

“Ensign Forrest,

“Of H. M.—Regt.

Bombay,”

—to whom it was addressed. Even Mrs. Green would not dare give it up to the rector himself, should he thus seek to repossess himself of Michael’s letter; and Victoria walked back with exultant rapid steps, feeling a great strain off her mind, congratulating herself on the promptness of that afternoon’s actions, when she caught sight of her father’s and Mildred’s figures at the end of the green; and she hurried up to her room to untie her hat, to sit down at the open window to let the wind fan her flushed face, and to try to recall each word of that hastily-read letter.

As time passed on, and her father came not, exultation at her promptitude began to fade into the feeling, “Why did I not read it once again? Why did I not think again before I wrote that; and I have never answered half he said; he will think me cold. Oh, I have done a great sin, and gained very little!” and the face, which the girl raised from her hands, was wan and haggard. “And how can I tell my father? I *must* tell him, I can-

not let him find it out. He will never trust me again, and no wonder! I have taken my fate into my own hands, and I must bear it. God help me!"

And then Mr. Franklyn and Mildred did come in, and she heard him turn into his study. Poor Victoria! she need not have spent the next ten minutes in such fear and trembling; his errand was but to correct one of the boys' exercises; and when, at the end of this torturing ten minutes, she herself entered the study, without giving any notice of her approach, it was to find him thus engaged.

"Don't pity me; I dare say I look ill——" interrupted Victoria abruptly, and her manner was almost more alarming than her looks; "I have come to tell you what I have done; what you would never believe, unless you heard it from my own lips——"

"That you are married to this man!" cried Mr. Franklyn, starting up and speaking in the tone of sudden conviction, not of sudden doubt.

"That I have done what you can less easily forgive than even the wrong of which you have thought," answered Victoria, with perfect gentleness of speech and manner, after one moment's gaze of unbounded astonishment at the suggestion he had made; "that I have stolen Michael's

letter from your desk ; I have read it, answered it, and posted them both, so that you *cannot* have it again—no never !” she added mournfully, all the exultation of an hour ago having vanished utterly.

There was a dead silence for many minutes ; then Mr. Franklyn said solemnly, in a tone of anguish that cut his daughter to the heart, “O God, create in her a new heart, restore Thy Holy Spirit to her ! Forsake her not utterly !”

And the daughter crept away, humbled and rebuked as a little child. She asked for no kiss that night : she never sought a return to his favour ; but she set herself once more to do her duty. It was only after weeks of gentle patience, filial duty, quiet steady attention to all her former parish and domestic work, that Mr. Franklyn, finding that she would never even ask if he forgave her deed, himself drew her down to him as she wished him good-night, the evening before that on which Charlie was expected home, and kissed her.

“ Not yet, father, not yet !” she whispered tearfully, drawing back gently from his clasp ; “ you may forgive me, but I never can forgive myself.”

“ I do forgive you, my poor child.”

“ All the wrong I have done you, father ?”

“ Yes, all !”

“ A whole lifetime would be too short to show—oh, father, I thought I had done, at least, that which you could never forgive !”

“ ‘ And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord ; and Nathan said unto David, the Lord also hath put away thy sin.’ Could I dare, if I had the will, to be less merciful, my poor child ? ” and then Victoria nestled into those arms like a worn-out child, and wondered how she could ever have strayed from the paths which one so good had marked out for her ; and her prayer that night, and for many months, was as that of a little child, “ O Lord, teach me little Mary’s obedience and perfect trust in Thee ! ”

CHAPTER X.

THE BURNT LETTER.

BUT the next day passed without any Charlie appearing; however, on the following morning, as Victoria and Mildred were sitting at work in the old parlour, and her father reading the paper whilst awaiting the announcement of dinner, a young man flung himself in at the window with the exclamation, "Well! how are you all?"

"Well, Charlie!" said the rector holding out his hand, with more welcome in the tone and gesture than in the actual words.

"Why did you not come last night, Charlie?" cried Mildred, keeping his hand for a kiss.

"Have you enjoyed yourself?" asked Victoria, arousing herself to interest, and yet shunning his eyes; whilst Mrs. Franklyn's kisses and glances and fondling of his hands—when his voice had brought her down in a hurry from the orderly survey of her linen—is one of the many things which may better be imagined than described.

"We expected you yesterday."

"Yes, but I lost my train at Edinburgh, and got into Huntingdon so late I could not push on here. I was dead beat at last, so I got a bed at Norah Creina's," added the big boy, affecting a not unbecoming brogue.

"Where?" asked his father, laying down the 'Times' upon his knee.

"At Norah Cre—old Mrs. Forrest's! don't you remember the old name for her?—in what rages it used to put poor Mike! By the bye, she has just heard from him, from the heart of the mutiny; he pronounces the climate 'bastely and no misthake,' but has had the pleasure of helping to give the Sepoys one good thrashing, and was looking forward to doing the same the next day. She's as proud of him as——" Charlie's powers of comparison failed him, and he broke off abruptly with, "And how is poor Farmer Field?"

"He died only yesterday, Charlie," said his mother.

"Ah! we shall miss his old face on Sundays. And now I suppose you are just going to dinner. Come along, Vic!" much as he would have called a little dog after him, and Victoria obeyed the call.

"You look as if you had enjoyed yourself," she began, as the young man turned up the sleeves of

his loose rough coat, to utter a not very careful exclamation at finding his jug empty.

"I'll fill it, Charlie; I dare say the boys have been here!" and presently she was back again, to find him fumbling in his pockets, with the rumination—

"I do declare I've lost it! No, here it is! A note from Norah Creina to you, my dear."

"Thank you," said Victoria, taking the note, and avoiding Charlie's mischievous gaze of inquiry.
"How is she?"

"Very well, awfully dull though, and *maning* to go back to Ireland as soon as Sir Michael is good enough to get better or to die!"

"Is he ill?"

"Did not you know? Desperately bad. A fine fellow, though, his death will make of little Mike! And there's good shooting about the Old Forest, I reckon."

"But has he been ill long?"

"Ten days or so; and another attack will be the end of him, say the doctors!"

"Thank God!" escaped Victoria, from the bottom of her heart, and almost unconsciously.

"What a bloodthirsty little villain you are! Still, I see no more than you why old uncles should live on, when they are only in the way.

Well, now, you must be dying to get at your letter, and I can do without you. Stay! just have my bag brought up, will you?"

Victoria did his bidding, and then went to her own room to open Mrs. Forrest's envelope; it contained nothing but a smaller envelope directed to "Miss Franklyn, Bayfield Rectory," in a hand that made her cheek flush, and her knees tremble: then, without one moment's delay, she ran down to the kitchen, thrust the letter, with her own hands, between the bars of the grate, to be recalled from her intended flight upstairs again by Mildred's cheery voice, "Victoria, dinner is quite ready, and Charlie is come down."

Some hours later in the day, as Mr. Franklyn was crossing the green, on his way to Mrs. Field's, Victoria slipped her arm through his and said:

"Papa, I am going to ask you a great kindness, which I do not deserve."

"What, my dear?"

"Mrs. Forrest sent me a note to-day containing a letter from her son; I did not look at it, papa, I burnt it at once. . But oh! will you write and tell him that I can never answer him, but that I can——"

"What, Victoria?"

"Can never forget him, never!"

"My dear, how can I say such things?"

"No," said Victoria meekly; "but what will he think of me?"

"He knows that I prohibited all correspondence; he will learn that even a nature, impetuous as his own, *can* be obedient."

"Then you will not write a tall, papa?" asked Victoria, after a long pause.

"Yes; I will write to say that letters, *however* sent, will be destroyed unread; that you yourself acquiesce in the necessity of such a step, and will never answer him in any way."

"*Can* never, please, papa!"

"My love," said Mr. Franklyn in another tone, "how can you cling to the memory of a man whom I never thought worthy of you, though I never dreamt of his proving himself so utterly unworthy as he is doing now. Surely, his persistency in trying to entangle you into a secret correspondence must open your eyes to his utter want of principle, not to say of even gentlemanly feeling."

"Poor fellow! he must so want to hear," murmured Victoria, softly.

"I am going in to see Mrs. Field, good-bye," said Mr. Franklyn, with some of his old sharpness; and opening the farm gate, he murmured in his turn, "What inexplicable infatuation! Stock and

Carpenter shall be my last pupils. Mildred shall not be exposed to any such danger. But how could any one imagine such a girl as Victoria setting her heart on one so utterly unworthy of her,—a man of whom she would tire in a week!"

CHAPTER XI.

CHARLIE IN TROUBLE.

“ **H**OW is Mr. Franklyn this morning, Miss Milly ? ” asked old Widow Stokes, one February morning of the next year, after Mildred had put into her hand a hospital ticket for her son, the former blower of *das kleine Mütterchen*, for which she had come to the rectory to ask.

“ Scarcely better, thank you, Mrs. Stokes,” answered Mildred, somewhat less plump and more sedate than four months back ; “ but he had a little more sleep last night,” she added.

“ And the poor dear missus ? ”

“ Pretty well, thank you ; Victoria sat up with papa last night, so mother had a rest.”

“ Well, God bless you all, my poor dear ! I feared the worst when they told me ; it was just such an attack as he had the winter before Miss Mary died,—ten years ago ; how time flies, to be sure ! ” And then Widow Stokes hobbled away, to make room for the boy with the letter-bag.

Mildred carried it into the parlour, where was Victoria sitting by the fire, before going to bed, after her last night's watching. It was a bright clear frost, and the brightness without seemed to make the watcher's pallor and weariness the more marked.

"Is the coffee hot, dear?" said Mildred, returning anxiously to her duties as breakfast-maker.

"Yes, thank you; are those the letters?" And Victoria opened the bag, her hand trembling as she did so.

"For you?" asked Mildred, as the bag proved to contain but one.

"Yes," said Victoria, rising; "no more, thank you, dear; no, indeed, I cannot eat!"

"But mother said, I *must* see that you did eat something; let me make you a fresh piece of toast;" and Mildred cut a thin slice, with a practised hand, as she spoke; and, without waiting for Victoria's permission, knelt down before the fire, and began her task.

"Thank you; I will be back in a minute," said her sister, thankful for this reprieve; and then she went to the study—for a week now unoccupied, and cold and cheerless; and there opened her letter to read—

"DEAR VIC.—It is all up with me. Here am

I reported to the whole lot of them at eleven to-morrow, and rustication till the end of the term is the least I can expect. If it ends *so*, I can never face my father nor any of you again. I shall go off straight to Australia, and you must break it to them as you can. You know how little I am to blame compared to—no matter who! But I must say they have done what they could for me, knowing my father was ill, and all that. God bless you all! This comes of not keeping my promises this time last year,—at the time I meant to keep them. By this time to-morrow I shall know my fate, and will write it to you. Ever your affectionate brother,

“C. S. FRANKLYN.”

“What can be done? Is there anything that can be done?” asked Victoria of herself, with unnatural calmness, as she sat down upon the old-fashioned window-seat, and leant her head upon her hand; “It would kill my father! It shall not be!”

But how was it to be prevented? Suddenly a way occurred to her, and she sprang up with a resolution that brought a flush of colour back to her pale cheeks and lips. She looked at the clock on the mantelpiece; it pointed to twenty minutes to five! To the watch at her side, it was but a

quarter past eight. Thank God! there *was* time.

"Your toast is quite ready," said Mildred, as she re-entered the parlour.

"Thank you!" said Victoria, as she helped herself to butter; "what are you going to do this morning, Milly?"

"Going to see poor little Sally, and take her a new picture-book, if you don't want me," replied Mildred wistfully, wishing that she could be made of more immediate use, in this time of sickness.

"No, thank you, I shall walk with you a little way."

"Mother hoped you would go to bed at once."

"I shall go up as soon as I come in; and then, Milly, don't let any one disturb me. I shall lock the door, and not want anything till tea-time."

And in another ten minutes the two sisters were crossing the green together, and the keen fresh air had already made Victoria feel another creature. When they reached the lane leading to Sally Turner's, she bade Mildred "good-bye," repeated her desire not to be thought of till tea-time, and then walked very quickly to the little village station. The down train was already approaching, Victoria took a ticket for Cambridge. Yes, there was, mercifully, no other Bayfield passenger; and in another minute she was off.

She was alone in the carriage. The next station at which this train stopped was Huntingdon. Victoria passed the intervening half-hour on her knees, her face buried in her hands.

She reached Cambridge at half-past ten, thankfully accepted the first proffered fly, unconscious of the curious and admiring gazes turned upon her, and briefly told the driver to take her to Muriel College.

"Muriel College, Miss?" repeated the man, with a stare; "The Lodge, Miss?"

"Yes, the Lodge," answered Victoria, who knew not yet what she was to do, now that her journey was accomplished; "The Lodge," she repeated to herself, bewildered. "Ah, yes! Dr. Calvert is married, has children; I will go to him, himself."

"Is Dr. Calvert at home?" she asked, a quarter of an hour later, of the man who opened the door of Muriel Lodge to her.

"I will inquire, ma'am." No, the President had just gone in to a college meeting.

It struck eleven; already Charlie's fate was being weighed in the balance. "And Mrs. Calvert?" persisted Victoria, the alternative coming to her as an inspiration.

Mrs. Calvert *was* at home. Victoria dismounted, and was shown across the hall into a pretty morn-

ing-room, where a little boy of four, stretched at full length upon the hearthrug, was caressing a greyhound.

"What name shall I give, Miss?"

"Miss Franklyn," answered Victoria, and then was left alone with the dog and its young play-fellow, unconscious with what surprise both were regarding this sudden intruder.

At length, after what seemed to Victoria interminable minutes—for what might not already be decided in this interval?—the door opened, and there entered a slight fair woman of five-and-twenty, holding by the hand a little girl of three.

"Miss Franklyn?" she repeated rather shyly, as if thinking that the name must have been mis-reported to her.

"Yes; Charles Franklyn's sister," said Victoria, rising and speaking with a hoarse voice, and in an excited under tone, "He told me that today his—"

"Run away, Reggie,—yes, take Rolf with you, if you like, and take Laura too. Yes?" resumed Mrs. Calvert, as she closed the door behind her children.

"I am Charles Franklyn's sister,—our father is very ill,—any excitement would be very dangerous,—it would break his heart that his son should be

rusticated ; it will be enough for him to know that he even deserved such disgrace.”

“ I—I am very sorry for you, Miss Franklyn,” said Mrs. Calvert with some pitying dignity as Victoria paused ; “ but, I believe your brother was forewarned of what he might expect, if the offence of last November were repeated.”

“ Yes ; I cannot excuse him ! I only beg you to have mercy.”

“ Me ? What can I do ?”

“ Entreat your husband to remember that he was once an undergraduate ; that he——”

“ Dr. Calvert has already gone into this meeting.”

“ Yes ; they told me so ; I know how precious every moment is. Oh, Mrs. Calvert, you are a mother ; think what you would feel if it were your own son’s fate that was being decided, and have pity upon us !”

“ But what can I do ?” repeated Mrs. Calvert in another tone, tears springing to her eyes at the sight of her visitor’s misery.

“ Entreat for mercy !”

“ I—I could not interrupt the meeting,” said the young wife, aghast at the idea.

“ Could you not ? Not to do us a kindness we could never forget ?”

"Oh, no! Dr. Calvert would never forgive me; university etiquette is so——"

"So destructive to humanity!" said Victoria, with a bitter smile. "I suppose it is!" and there was a dead pause. Suddenly a peal of laughter rose through the air, and the little Reginald bounded past the windows, Rolf behind him.

"Mrs. Calvert," said Victoria flinging herself on her knees before the boy's mother; "remembering that some day your own son may need like mercy, can you dare to be merciless yourself?"

"I—I can do nothing," said poor Mrs. Calvert, tears running down her face; "I dare not go in. I—I will ask Dr. Calvert if the sentence can be reconsidered, should it be a hard one. Yes, I think I might do that."

"Faint pleading would it be!" thought Victoria, and her heart sank down like lead; and, at that moment, the pretty French clock over the mantel-piece chimed the quarter.

"God forgive you!" said Victoria rising from her knees; "I never can! God help us all!"

"If I could do anything!" cried Mrs. Calvert, her heart wrung.

"Can you do this?" asked Victoria clearly and calmly, suddenly laying her hand on her hostess's

arm ; "let me in where you dare not go yourself?"

"I can ! I will !" cried Mrs. Calvert, without daring to think twice ; and, opening the door at once, she led her visitor hurriedly across the hall and down an oak-walled passage, and opening a door, without knock or attempt at preparation, stood by for Victoria to pass. She did so ; and the door closed upon herself, and the President and Fellows of Muriel.

"An example *must* be made," were the words that caught her ear ; then there was a dead silence ; all eyes were turned on this most unlooked-for intruder.

"I—I fear you have——"

"Did you——?"

But neither President nor Dean finished their sentence.

"I came to speak to Dr. Calvert," said Victoria calmly, whilst her heart beat so fast and loud that she could scarcely hear the sound of her own words.

"Yes ?" said the President rising, amazed, yet courteous.

"I—I came to beg for mercy for my brother!" pursued Victoria, advancing to the table, and gazing round on the elderly, astonished faces

round it ; " he is my only brother. Oh, have pity on him ! "

" Miss Reynart——?"

" No ; Charles Franklyn's sister. It—it would break his father's heart if he were rusticated ; he is his only son. You once had fathers," added Victoria, venturing a glance round in search of a friendly face ; " think what they would have suffered had you been in my brother's place ! "

" You—you may be sure that Mr. Franklyn's case shall be dealt with, with entire impartiality," said the President, clearing his throat ; " and now let me give you an arm back into the Lodge ; Mrs. Calvert shall give you some luncheon. You are faint ?" he asked, withdrawing his arm in alarm, at the expression which had come upon the young girl's face.

" A little ; I was up all last night with my father—he is very ill—any excitement might prove fatal—only yesterday the doctor said so,—he—oh ! will no one take pity on me ?"

" We shall not forget that Mr. Franklyn was apparently led on by——" began the President, with an attempt to preserve his dignified composure, but turning upon the other members of the meeting a glance which emboldened the kind-hearted Dean to exclaim :

"If rustication can be avoided in his case, it shall be!"

"Oh, thank you; you—*you* have not children, but Dr. Calvert, you have. If you are merciful to us this day, God show mercy to you and yours in the day of calamity."

There was a pause. Some were gazing at Victoria's sweet face in mere admiration of its beauty; some in admiration of the courage which had emboldened her thus to intrude upon their meeting. One, leaning back, put his hand before his eyes to hide from his fellows the tears that therein were swimming. His own rustication, fifteen years ago, *had* broken his widowed mother's heart: true, Muriel had had abundant honour for him since,—the hard lesson had, in his case, answered the desired end; but he knew its bitterness, and was careful how he helped to inflict it on another. He had already, that day, been advocating mercy; now, leaning back, he resolved not to leave the room till he had won it, not only for Charles Franklyn, but for all concerned in the same misdemeanour, saving the ringleader, upon whom it would be true mercy to himself, as well as others, to let justice take its full course.

"And now let me show you back into the Lodge," said the President after another pause,

and Victoria took his arm, only turning back at the doorway to say, "You promise me to be merciful?"

One or two said "Yes!" one "Yes, yes!" as if he wondered that a doubt upon the subject could be possible; one, the youngest, said, and he thought it,—so would have thought Charles Franklyn's father a few years ago,—"Severity is often the truest mercy to a young man."

"You—you won't let that man be severe?" cried Victoria, clinging to the President's arm and turning her lovely eyes into his face. He hurried her into the passage, closed the door and said gruffly, "No, no! don't be afraid; he sha'n't be harmed."

"God bless you!"

"I—I—Mary! Mary, give Miss Franklyn some luncheon, and then let her have some rest. Good morning," he added, in his usual bland and frigid tone to strangers, and was gone.

"He—you—?" asked Mrs. Calvert, gathering strange hope from the unwonted emotion of her husband's call upon herself.

"He has promised me that Charlie shall not be harmed," answered Victoria repeating the President's words unconsciously.

"And you will have some luncheon!"

"No, thank you, I must go back; they know nothing of this at home. Now, thanks to you, dear Mrs. Calvert, they need never know; but if I am missed, my mother will be terribly alarmed. I *can* catch the 12.20 train, I told the man to wait."

"Yes; but you still have ten minutes to spare, you must have some refreshment."

"If I could see my brother!" cried Victoria, with radiant eyes; oh! she could never be so welcome to any one again as she would be at that moment to her brother.

"Oh no!"

"He—he is not in any confinement?"

"No, but oh, it would be quite impossible for you to go to his rooms; you are so young, and not even a married sister. No, you must not think of doing anything but going straight from here to the station," added Mrs. Calvert, commandingly.

Victoria smiled as she submitted; and yet from what torture would one word to Charlie have saved him! But in reality, each minute of that torturing hour worked for Charles Franklyn's good.

Kind little Mrs. Calvert had, notwithstanding some fear of her husband's displeasure, ventured to order luncheon for their strange guest, so soon as she had shown her into the combination room

and there left her to her fate. Victoria ate and drank a little ; but if, three hours ago, there had been a load on her heart, which had made her loathe the very sight of Mildred's coffee or hot toast, there was now a glad thankfulness that made it next to impossible to sit down quietly to eat chicken and tongue, and drink sherry and water. Still, to please her hostess, she contrived to do a little of both ; and then was rejoiced that there was no time for rest ; and that she could at once bid her farewell without courtesy.

“ If I ever can do you a service, let me know,” said Victoria fervently, as she pressed Mrs. Calvert’s hand at parting.

“ Thank you, but—yes, my love, you may give the lady your flowers,” and so Reginald mounted the step of the fly to thrust his bunch of snow-drops into Victoria’s hand.

“ Thank you,” said the girl, her eyes once more wet with tears.

“ Yes, Mrs. Calvert, I do hope with you, you will never *need* such a service,” and then the fly drove off and she was gone.

By two o’clock she was unlatching the rectory gate, terribly afraid she should have been missed, and that her disappearance should have occasioned fresh anxiety to any of her dear ones. But no,

Mildred had been resolute that no one should disturb her,—good, upright Milly, who started as Victoria passed the parlour-window, yet never asked one inconvenient question, although she gave vent to her surprise by saying, as she met her sister—

“ I had no idea you had got up again. I listened at your door, and thought you were still asleep, you were so quiet; yet I did so want to tell you that cousin Launcelot was come.”

“ Is he ? ”

“ Yes ; he was in town on business when mother’s letter, saying how ill papa was, reached him ; and so he came round this way to see us all. He wanted to see you ; but as you had told me not to let you be disturbed, he said he should go on and see Charlie, and come back here to-night.”

Then Launcelot Saunderson had been in the train which had passed her own near Sudley, but forty minutes ago. He would bring back news of Charlie. Ah ! how little he knew of what bad news he might have been the bearer. No ; no wonder that, at the thought of the misery which she had averted from her home, Victoria’s face became so radiant that Milly said :

“ How much good a walk does you, Ora ! and yet one turn round the garden tired mother, yesterday.”

"Yes—oh, I am so much better; I mean, I wonder whether mamma is tired, and would be glad that I should take her place."

"Oh, Ora! she has promised me that I shall sit with father, if she leaves him this afternoon," pleaded Milly, wistfully.

"And so you shall, Milly;" and then Victoria went upstairs, unlocked her door, undressed herself, and fell to sleep with that radiance lingering on brow and lip.

"And how is he to-night?" asked Launcelot Saunderson as, five hours later, having shaken the snow, now falling heavily, off his great coat, he entered the Bayfield parlour; but shutting the door quietly before even asking this one question.

"Better," said Victoria, the solitary occupant of the parlour; "Mr. Clement says this morning's sleep has, he thinks, turned the scale. Oh, Launcelot, such good hearing!"

"It is, indeed," said her cousin; and yet, heartfelt as the words were, he spoke them abstractedly, and was gazing, with a gaze that somehow made Victoria blush and feel uneasy, into the glowing, happy face, which he had last seen so pale and sad.

"You have——"

"Yes; I have been to Cambridge, and brought a note for you from Charlie. Well, my little cou-

sin, you did for him what no one else could have done. John Reynart wrote me word how things were going with him, and how he feared Charlie would rush madly out of England, if no one was by to prevent him. I stopped here by the way to learn what you could tell me—and was told you were in bed, and not to be disturbed till tea-time."

"It is tea-time, and here I am—so much rested with three hours' sleep," said Victoria, with something of the saucy coquetry she had once freely lavished on Launcelot Saunderson, who, do what she would, never could be brought within the circle of her admirers.

"More refreshed by your morning's work than your afternoon's sleep, I expect," said Launcelot, taking her hands, and gazing with grave admiration into her beautiful face; just then truly beautiful, even in the censorious eyes of one who was always finding Victoria totally uninteresting, from the entire absence of any likeness in her face and tone to little Mary, and always resenting—nay, rather, alternately was jarred upon and enchanted by—Mildred's brown hair and quiet, contented speeches.

"Oh, Launcelot! then you know all. I should think I am! Does Charles know I went?"

"Does he not! But here is his letter; he shall

speak for himself," and Launcelot put into her hands a note very different from that received but ten hours back.

Then came in Mrs. Franklyn, so pleased at Launcelot having come thus out of his way to see them, so thankful to have left her husband in one of those calm, refreshing slumbers which were the very restorers to him of life. "Milly can't be persuaded to give up her watch to Sarah," she said, after the first greetings, "so we must sit down to tea a small party, but a very happy one."

"Yes, indeed, mother," said Victoria, pushing back the now grey hair, the better to kiss the placid, grateful brow. But on that brow Launcelot could trace a furrow of which he knew the date,—that of the death of *das kleine Mütterchen*,—ten years ago.

CHAPTER XII.

MICHAEL HIS OWN MASTER.

"I TRAVELED down from town to-day with Mrs. Forrest, Maggie," said Mr. Franklyn, six months later, as he and his wife were sitting under the spreading walnut-tree of the rectory lawn. They had been, for the last few weeks, quite alone. Charles and his sisters were in Scotland with Launcelot Saunderson and his mother: pupils had never been resumed since the illness of last February, and would never be resumed again. It had greatly aged Mr. Franklyn in appearance and in bodily strength; his duties, as the parish priest of even little Bayfield, would be as much as he could conscientiously fulfil.

"I thought that Mrs. Forrest had left Huntingdon in March," said Margaret Franklyn, in answer to his remark.

"Yes; but she has been recalled to England by the death of Sir Michael Forrest."

"He is gone at last, poor man! And Charles, Michael must be now of age."

"Yes, last May; he is just one year older than Victoria;" and then both husband and wife were silent.

"I wish," added Mr. Franklyn, at length, "that he had come into the property a few years later; if he should still wish to make Victoria his wife (we shall have no ground of complaint if he never again attempts to come near her or us) I could scarcely be content to let them become engaged even now,—much less be married."

"I wonder what he *will* do. I am afraid Victoria would feel his desertion very much, if he did not again attempt to gain her; yet, how *can* he satisfy her?"

"How, indeed! I never fancied the feeling for one another could survive a month—that only the sudden parting had developed it for a time. Poor Victoria! this last year has indeed changed her."

"And improved her, poor child! She, too, has had to make her own choice between good and evil; but it has been a sore trial."

"Yes; once I thought it was mere obstinacy that made her cling to him, but there must be strong affection, too. For a whole year she has had no direct news of him; we shall see whether he has been as constant under trial."

"The first glimpse of to-day's 'Times,'" cried Charles Franklyn, that same day, as he handed one in through the window of the railway carriage in which himself and his party were travelling homeward from Edinburgh to Manchester. "Which of you ladies is for the births, deaths, and marriages? You, aunt? There you are."

Mrs. Saunderson took the proffered paper, and read down each entry deliberately.

"Well, mother! No news?" said Launcelot, who had been watching, with his amused and slightly severe smile, this careful regularity of conning.

"No, none—unless you call the death of Sir Michael Forrest such. He is George's uncle, I suppose?"

"Yes; but it is little Mike that comes into the property, and title too, I believe. One can't fancy little Mike a landed country gentleman?"

"Why not?" asked Victoria, with some sharpness.

"He was a thoroughly good-hearted, but such an essentially undignified little fellow when I last saw him."

"But he grew very much the last two years," said Milly, anxious that justice should be done every one.

"And even a year of active life may have changed him, in graver matters than in height," said Launcelot, with a slight smile. "He was one-and-twenty this spring, I think. Of course, this must bring him home."

That night the whole party spent at Laurel House. It was little changed since the two girls had been there twelve months ago. Victoria was glad once more to be within it; and the next day, which was Sunday, expressed a wish to go to the service at the cathedral.

"You will be sadly disappointed in it after Durham and York," said Launcelot.

"Yes. Charlie will go with me, won't you?" asked Victoria, turning her beautiful blue eyes upon her brother.

"If you wish it," said Charlie; "but it is a dirty unsatisfactory hole, if I remember right. Pretty nearly all I *do* remember of it is the one hundred and forty-seven banns we heard, the only Sunday I was there. Why, Launcelot, even you and Victoria, with your out-of-the-way names, might be married there, and no one be the wiser. I suppose the clergyman says, on Monday morning, 'Ladies and gentlemen, I'll marry you all, but you must sort yourselves.' Those banns were as bad as the first chapter of St. Luke as a third lesson."

"I am afraid that you are more li
the number of those banns increased
nished in the last five years," said I
touch of sharpness in his gravity.

"Yes, I suppose so," said Charlie
mouredly; and, finding that he had re
a strain not pleasing to his elders, he at
to this speech, "Yes, I'll go with y
you'll just come and look me up wher
to be off."

Victoria did so; and the two walked
evening distance in silence. There was
markable in the service, save that Ch:
gaze and thoughts had become wande
time the thanksgiving prayer was re
who had happened at the moment in
exceptional words were used, "particu
who desires now to offer up her praises
givings for thy late mercies vouchsafed
be counting the beads in the bog-oak
(his sister's arm), was struck not only by
fervour with which, at that thanksgivin
were clasped together, but with the de
and yet contrition upon her sweet and
face.

Meanwhile Mrs. Saunderson and h
Mildred had been to their immedi

MICHAEL KIRKWOOD MARTIN 115

church, and reaching some what farther down
the gully to the eastern wall of the valley, the
Sandstone was at first white, then tan or yellow
and Mottled grey the base a layer of sand
near the water which marks the middle part
of the sand gravel layer of the
running water about 10 feet
feet. The sand has been washed
since and broken up
Lancaster and the
and ~~square~~ square

"I ~~saw~~ ~~the~~ ~~lawn~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~day~~
day by the ~~sun~~ ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~sun~~ ~~was~~
said ~~lawn~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~day~~ ~~was~~
night when ~~the~~ ~~lawn~~ ~~was~~
lawn ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~day~~

"My app-
don't think =
" Did you want
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if you had, last year, been more consistent in your repulses, he would not have doubted the—" Launcelot felt that he was speaking extremely ill-naturedly,—what made him feel at variance with all the world, and most of all with himself?—and he cut short the reproof to add, " But go home before Thursday, if you will ; let us keep the others ; I can see you past your last change on Tuesday,—not on Wednesday, unfortunately."

" Oh, Launcelot, thank you ! " said Victoria, in a low tone, but one of unmistakable relief.

" But had I not better come too, Ora ? " asked Mildred wistfully.

" No ; Charlie will bring you home. I must seem very ungrateful, aunt," added Victoria, meekly, her hand straying to her aunt's for pardon.

" I don't so much mind, my dear, so that you leave me Milly ; she can arrange the flowers for me on Thursday, and entertain the Miss Wilcotts very nicely, I dare say ; and if you don't mean to be kinder to poor Luke Grant than last year, it is best you should not meet again."

" Much better," said Victoria ; and so the matter dropped ; and on the following Tuesday evening she was once more in Bayfield rectory.

Bayfield was two days' post from Manchester;

"My dear, when I have asked him to dine here on Thursday on purpose to meet you," said Mrs. Saunderson in dismay.

"I cannot meet him, I will not meet him. This quite determines me to go on Wednesday."

"On my word, Miss Vic, you're not over-gracious," said Charles, in some vexation.

"How can I think of mere graciousness—" began Victoria, fiercely, but only to check herself, and add, "Let me go home on Wednesday alone, as you and Milly wish to stay."

"Well! If I wished ever so much to go home, I could not say so with my host and hostess sitting by. What's the matter with you, Vic?"

"I do so want to be at home," said Victoria, seizing the hand he had laid half roughly, half fondlingly, upon hers; "Oh, Charlie! take me back, and—"

"Ora! we will all go home if you think it best," began Mildred cheerfully.

"My love, I *can't* lose you both; we have asked the Grays and Wilcotts for Thursday as well as the Grants; what am I to do with a heap of young people thrown on me for entertainment?"

"If I stay, Launcelot, promise me that Mr. Grant shall not come near me."

"I am sorry that he is coming, Victoria; but

"Copying a letter for Launcelot, but I have nearly finished it. Can I do anything for you, aunt?"

"Just come into the storeroom, my dear, when you have done it,—and a very neat hand you write, I must say, Milly. Launcelot is so particular, he never will let me write for him; indeed I couldn't see to copy for him now if he would let me;" and then Mrs. Saunderson bustled back to her storeroom, to debate the point of sufficiency or not sufficiency of her supply of nectarines for dessert, until Mildred came, and with immediate decision, pleasantly expressed, settled the point in favour of sufficiency, and then set herself to work to arrange the flowers.

Launcelot did not come in to Laurel House for luncheon that day, which was certainly a disappointment to Milly Franklyn, although he had said that he expected to be too busy to look in before four, when he had promised to take her to see one of his "hands;" a boy of fourteen, whose fingers, owing to his own carelessness, had been sadly mangled in the mill last week. Syms lived near; and, if Mildred were once shown the way, she would often find a spare half-hour in which to visit the lad. So had Launcelot Saunderson told her; and Mildred Franklyn was prepared to do it.

She was sitting awaiting him in the drawing-room, when he looked in with his pleasant smile to see if she were ready; and in a few minutes Bill Syms was reached; the lad was alone, all the other "hands" of the house being still at the mill.

Launcelot did not pay a very long visit, for he had plenty of other matters to attend to before his dinner-party at seven, and after dropping Mildred once more at Laurel House, went back to his factory work, from which he was only just coming in when his mother and cousin returned from their afternoon drive.

From his study he heard the sedate happy step run up the stairs, only a minute later to come down again; then his cousin knocked at his door, and when he opened it—he had never asked any one within that room, and Mildred never dreamt of entering it—she put into his hand his letter and her copy, saying, like a child, "Is that copied neatly enough, Lancy?"

"Quite, thank you, Milly," he answered with a smile, and then closed the door with the bitter question, "And what is to be the end of this? Why," he added mentally, almost passionately, "will she keep growing more and more like *das kleine Mütterchen*, instead of less and less, as was once the case, I am sure?"

Meanwhile, Milly—utterly unconscious of how, day by day, she was more and more upsetting the even balance of cousin Launcelot's mind—had run up the stairs all the more happily for his approbation of her handiwork, and began her evening toilet; and the very picture of a modest, cheerful, and sufficiently good-looking English maiden was it who, just before the clock struck seven, entered the drawing-room of Laurel House, in a white muslin dress with blue ribbons; some delicate Maltese gold pins (a style of adornment then just coming into fashion) showing to advantage the soft, though somewhat dark-tinted, skin of her throat, and the wavy brownness of that hair which, even in the years of greatest dissimilarity, Launcelot could never cease to identify with “Mary’s dear brown hair!”

Mr. Grant took Mildred in to dinner, and had so much to say to her, that, in spite of guessing much of their conversation to be about the missing elder sister, Launcelot grew uneasy. Nor did he like to see Frank Wilcott, a little later, so devote himself to her pretty, simple singing. And yet why should he care?—he, growing a middle-aged man, whose only possible wife had been taken from him years ago, long before marriage had been possible to either.

And that night, when his guests were departed, Launcelot went into the little study which he so jealously guarded from all chance entrance, and unlocking the lid of the cover which had ever hid the nature of the picture over his mantelpiece from all eyes, save his own, from the day it had been placed there, gazed long at the picture it contained. It was of the old-fashioned window of the parlour at Bayfield Rectory, and the light of the evening sun fell upon the dark thinned locks of Mr. Franklyn, and on the brown locks of *das kleine Mütterchen*, as she sat by his side, her eyes seeking his from off the little Greek Testament before her.

Long pains, much disappointment, much money had this picture cost Launcelot Saunderson. Though he had summoned courage to ask his uncle to let him have a sketch taken of him, and had, after two years' pressing, gained his point, taken in that window, yet the first-rate artist whom he had employed had not, to him, put even into the father's countenance all that his nephew himself found therein : how much less had he infused into that of the maiden (whose figure had been added to this highly-finished copy of the original sketch) half the sweetness, the steadfastness, and incommutable beauty which it had ever borne unto himself.

What had the painter had from which to gather this incommunicable beauty? A daguerreotype of the young girl, the loan of which Launcelot having with difficulty obtained, he was at constant pains to assure the artist was very little like the original; a lock of hair, which he was as constantly assured was of a lighter, redder hue than that which had been ordinarily visible in the tresses of Mary Franklyn; and the young man's own eager, yet by turns reluctant, description of her looks and ways. Still this ardent admiration of a dead child of thirteen had kindled sympathy and enthusiasm in the heart of the great painter, of whom so much more was expected than even he could possibly perform and if Launcelot's first feeling on gazing at the finished copy had been as if once more the whole hope of his life had been undone, the artist himself looked back on that quiet interior with heartfelt satisfaction, and very natural regret that his request to exhibit it in the following year's Academy exhibition had been so decidedly refused.

He little thought that in August, 1858, no eyes but those of its orderer had ever yet beheld it since it had left his studio eight years ago.

But by August, 1858, Launcelot gazed on it himself with more kindly eyes. It had grown familiar, intimately connected with all his memories

of *das kleine Mütterchen*. And, alas, in eleven years his own memory of her had lost its sharpness ; he did not now feel positive that she would *never* have laid her left hand in the position now before him ; he only knew that she never would have done so because he had *once* felt positive as to its incorrectness. And this night came the helping suggestion, “neither would Mildred.” And then the lid was once more closed, and Launcelot Saunderson, instead of going upstairs to bed,—and it had struck one, and he was a methodical man and early riser,—unbarred his window and stepped forth into the lime-walk.

He glanced up at the house ; all was silent, every light extinguished ; for half an hour he paced that narrow walk between the red-brick wall and its hiding limes, the withered leaves rustling beneath his feet ; in spite of himself, Mildred’s voice, as she had that night sung the words, “The hopes of youth fall thick in the blast,” singing in his ears. Verily all hopes, worth calling such, had fallen in one blast in very early youth ; and in that midnight walk, Launcelot Saunderson resolved that the ripeness of his manhood should be allowed no hopes at all.

CHAPTER XIII.

VICTORIA'S TWO SECRETS.

ON October the 4th, 1858, there was once more lying in the rectory post-bag, a letter, directed by the hand of Michael Forrest ; but this time he had addressed himself to Mr. Franklyn. The last few months had not only made him his own master, but left him motherless.

It was the one solitary letter. Victoria, her mother, as well as her father, knew at once from whom that letter came ; perhaps it was no wonder that Victoria should lean back white as death.

Mildred was at the sea with Mrs. Saunderson, who had only parted with the girl, at the very end of August, on condition of resuming possession on her way southwards a month later. Mrs. Saunderson was growing old ; she had always shown her Bayfield nieces great kindness. "Mildred is not the girl for such companionship to hurt her," had said Mr. Franklyn, after some minutes' mental debate ; and so Mildred had left her father, mother,

and sister once more alone; she had not much wished to go; cousin Launcelot had said that he should be too busy to join them; and home life was very pleasant after so long an absence. But the parents had settled the matter for her; and so she went, and now was very happy at Cromer: by no means the less happy, because cousin Launcelot had unexpectedly escorted them hither, and stayed over the first Sunday.

And so, this bright October 4th found Mr. and Mrs. Franklyn and their elder daughter alone, Charles having dined the previous evening in Huntingdon and not being expected home till the mid-day train, when Sir Michael's letter came. Yes, little Michael was of age, a baronet, and one of the richest proprietors in Dorsetshire; and mindful of this change in their relative positions, Mr. Franklyn opened the letter. He opened it at once; he knew Victoria well enough to know that she could bear the worst evil better than suspense.

"It—it is a very puzzle-headed letter," said the rector of Bayfield, as, after perusing his own share of the thick packet twice, he laid it down upon the table; "his affection for you, my poor child, remains unchanged; and that is really all I can understand of it, except that when the news of Sir Michael's death reached him, he was himself very

ill with fever, and that he thinks, even without this cause, he would have been ordered home."

"When does he expect to be in England?" asked Mrs. Franklyn, in pity to Victoria, who had made one attempt at speech, but her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth, and she did not repeat the trial.

"As soon as he was fit for the voyage, poor fellow! He can scarcely have been fit to write at all, I fear; he says he encloses a letter for Victoria which will tell me more; but, instead, he has put into the cover a letter to Lady Forrest. Perhaps yours has gone to the Old Forest, my love," he added kindly, seeing Victoria's increasing agitation; "no doubt, Lady Forrest would forward it here at once; we will send in to meet the second post at Huntingdon to-morrow."

"Let her see his letter to you, Charles," said Mrs. Franklyn, laying it before Victoria, who took it and forced herself to read it with sufficient composure to comprehend its meaning. When she had finished it, she laid it down quietly, and said, "Will you let me look at the enclosure, papa?"

"There it is, 'Lady Forrest, Bayfield Rectory;' it is evident that he was not really strong enough for all that he has been obliged to do."

"It is no mistake, papa," interrupted Victoria,

who, in truth, had not heard one of these later words ; “ I mean that, though he could not have *meant* to direct it to me so, it is the *true* direction. I have been Michael’s wife, not your daughter, for more than fifteen months.”

There was a dead pause ; not only Mr. Franklyn but his wife believed that long trouble and anxiety had distracted their daughter’s mind, and were now making her say she knew not what.

“ I was married to him on June 22nd, 1856, in Manchester, at the parish church ; he—he begged me on his knees to make him secure of me, and I consented ! God knows the misery I brought upon myself, I—I hope it made him happier ! ”

“ Victoria, do you know what you are saying ? ” cried Mr. Franklyn sternly, laying his hand upon her shoulder.

“ Yes,” cried Victoria, rising, her temper suddenly changed, and her eyes flashing ; “ and so it was my *husband’s* letter that you would have kept from me ; it is my husband whose constancy you have been doubting,—whom you have insulted, derided. No wonder my patience sometimes failed me ! ”

Again there was a pause : and then Mr. Franklyn returned to his place, and said, “ Doubtless this letter is *intended* for you ; whether, after what I have heard, I give it to you, is another matter ! ”

"You cannot keep it from me. Oh, think what it cost me, last October, to fling his words of love into the fire unread!"

Mrs. Franklyn rose, and putting her kind arms around her daughter, said, "No one would keep her husband's letters from her. Poor dear, I too am a wife, and know what you must have undergone."

"I thought at first I should go mad," murmured Victoria; "I—I think I was mad when I stole that letter; yet," she added, looking round bewildered, "it was *mine*, and at that time I thought, though man could never forgive me, that in God's sight I was justified."

"One great sin never fails to bring others in its train," said Mr. Franklyn, who had remained as one struck to the heart; "on your mother's opinion I yield you your letter," and placing it before her, he slowly left the room.

Victoria tore open the envelope, and her eyes grew moist, her face gentle, as she read. Her own dear, honest Michael, whom no one thought worthy of her! What were talents or a pure English accent, compared with the advantages of heart which he did possess? She had just finished the rough blurred lines when her father re-entered the room to say coldly—

"I am writing to Manchester for a copy of the certificate of your marriage; what is the exact date?"

"I have a copy upstairs, papa. Michael and I each had one. I will fetch it directly," said Victoria eagerly; "and do, papa, read this note to you, whilst I am gone; you can never think him unworthy of me again!"

"It would be difficult now, Victoria, to *find* a man unworthy of you."

Whereon Victoria raised her eyes to his in uncomprehending astonishment. The confession of her terrible secret had been such a relief and blessing to herself, that she could not yet believe that it had only been a most cruel blow to others. She forgot how it turned to bitterness all the remembrance of her past dutifulness and patience; that her father's one thought was, "An impostor all the time! Her very confession, last autumn, fresh hypocrisy."

She went away in silence, and returned with what, at one time, she had ever been moving from one place of security to another. Yes; there was no error in the form; the names, professions, dates, all tallied with the truth. The fact of their minority had been admitted.

"And you were actually married by banns?"

"Yes,—oh, it was a terrible risk," answered Victoria, sinking down, sick at heart at the thought of what disgrace and misery chance detection might have brought on her; "but Michael saved me all knowledge, all fear; he never told me till the morning we were married what he had been doing,—in his desperation at your sternness; and how could I fail him when he had run such a terrible risk? If Launcelot Saunderson had gone and heard the banns——"

"You would have been saved from the commission of a dreadful sin! Would to God that he had detected you!"

"Not Victoria, but Michael," said Mrs. Franklyn gently.

"Either of them! And who are these two people?" as he pointed to the attesting witnesses.

"The sexton and pew-opener or clerk—I don't know who. Michael managed it all. I do not know who they were."

"And how are we to make this shame known to the world?"

"Shame to be Michael's wife!" repeated Victoria, with a smile, a little scornful in its radiance, "I am not ashamed of being so. *I will tell the world,—that is, our world, if you would rather not,—he has taken care I should have no pain or*

difficulty that he could spare me. He has written to George Forrest and told him all; papa, you would have known *that* if you had read this letter to you, which he sent through me!"

"I have not read his second letter, and I have no wish to read it," said Mr. Franklyn fiercely, thrusting it back from him, as Victoria tried again to put it into his hand; "to be treated with such vile deception and ingratitude by one on whom I had spent years of care! It is enough—— What do you mean to do, Lady Forrest, until your husband returns?"

"Stay here, if you will let me; if not, go to my aunt at Leicester. She will not cast me off."

"Nor we, my love," said Mrs. Franklyn gently; "but cannot you say some word of sorrow——"

"I have no wish for any more of Victoria's words of sorrow," interrupted her husband; "last year, if I had only known what her professions of sorrow were really worth!"

"Oh, father! so hard as I have tried to be patient—and put by my duty to my husband, for that to you——"

"It was no wonder that a course of deceit became inevitable. Yes, we were all told very long ago, 'No man can serve two masters,' but it takes

many of us a lifetime to learn the saying's truth."

"Only read his letter to me," entreated Victoria.

"I have no wish to pry into your correspondence."

"Read that to yourself, Charles, with this new light upon it," said his wife; and, as Mr. Franklyn complied with this request, Victoria slipped away to fling herself on her knees beside her bed, still too full of gratitude and happiness to be cast down by her father's stern displeasure.

When Charles returned to Bayfield two hours later, with some message from Mr. Berry, which made him knock at the study door, and enter in his still careless fashion, it was to find his father sitting at his desk, with a countenance which made him breathlessly ask at once, "What *is* the matter?"

"Matter enough, Charlie; you may as well be told its nature at once. Michael Forrest——"

"You don't mean to say it is *true* that he is dead?" interrupted Charlie anxiously.

"No—not unless there has been later news than ours," said Mr. Franklyn, staggered in his wrath, and he turned hastily to the letters beside him to say, "September 1st, yes, that is the last date. Is your news later, Charlie?"

"I don't know. It was Mrs. Cavin, where his mother used to lodge, who began asking me if it were true, but I did not believe her, and could not stop; I only just caught the train as it was. I thought it was some stupid confusion with old Sir Michael's death."

"He had been very ill when he wrote to me; indeed, he said that at the time the news of Sir Michael's death reached him, he was himself almost given over; he may have had a relapse!"

"But what does he write to you about, father? Does he fling Victoria overboard, now that he is his own master?"

"Scarcely," said Mr. Franklyn, with a peculiar smile, but one in which there was no bitterness; "he and Victoria were married last June at Manchester."

"You don't say so!"

"Then even *you* knew nothing about it," said Mr. Franklyn, the lad's tone at once convincing him of his entire innocence of the whole misdoing; "thank God for that! such a terrible grief would have been the harder to bear, Charlie, if you had been deceiving us;" and Mr. Franklyn laid his hand kindly, and with something of fond security, upon his son's bronzed hand. Last year's fears of Charlie's steadiness had so entirely passed away as

to be forgotten. He had done very well at his little-go ; and, his tutor had told Mr. Franklyn, but a few weeks ago, was in all respects conducting himself creditably. Charlie had not inherited his father's talents, and Mr. Franklyn had, even before sending him to Winchester, relinquished any hope of his college career being a brilliant one ; but he had, not a year ago, had many miserable doubtings as to whether it would even be respectable.

"No ; Victoria never ever hinted at it. Poor thing, what a year she must have had of it !" said Charles, with unusual thoughtfulness. "No wonder she treated poor wretched Grant with such scorn. Ah, I see now why she set her heart on going to Manchester cathedral the one Sunday we were with the Saundersons this summer."

"She went?"

"Yes ; we had seen old Sir Michael's death in the paper of the previous day. Poor little Vic !" How often in old times had Charlie been reproved for using an abbreviation of his pet sister's name, which neither her father nor mother could endure ; but even its repetition passed unheeded now. "Poor little Vic ! I know, now, why she clasped her hands so tightly that Sunday morning, when some poor woman returned thanks for 'great mercies lately vouchsafed her.' What a mercy Sir

Michael's death was to her to be sure! What a bold step to be married out of hand at once!" added Charlie, with an admiration of the boldness that made Mr. Franklyn say sternly—

"She let her generous, impetuous nature hurry her into a sin which, even in this world, will never cease to find her out. Poor child! Very differently would she have become mistress of the Old Forest if she had but stayed to think twice before falling in with Michael's plan. He has the grace to own how entirely he took her unawares and hurried her into compliance. Half an hour before they were married she knew nothing of what he had been doing, and they parted at the church-door."

"Poor creatures!—but I say, father, they were both under age. Can't all this be hushed up, and they be married here all right?"

"They are married 'all right,' as you call it,—not only in God's sight, but in that of the law. If any one is liable to a penalty, it may be the clergyman who married them. They were married by banns, under their true names, confessedly under age. Poor little Michael, he is nothing but a boy still: he owns he longed to say of 'full age,' fearing some difficulty, but dared not tell anything but the exact truth everywhere, fearing, unknowingly to invalidate the marriage and harm his

precious wife. ‘And, unlucky fellow as I most am, no awkward questions were asked. There w^s such a heap of us, and the clergyman a strang one, and only glad to get rid of us all as fast as I could,’” added Mr. Franklyn, taking up one the sheets before him, and thence reading the last lines.

“Married by banns,” repeated Charles, “o hundred and fifty-three there were the Sunday we were there. Yet ‘Michael O’Callaghan Forrest and ‘Margaret Victoria Franklyn’ one wou have fancied marked names, even among many.”

“Yes; if there had been any one to mark them, said his father, sadly.

“The idea of his following her to Manchester—”

“I must own that she wrote to tell me he done that, and wanted to come home. But very distrust of herself made me surer of And when I went over to Huntingdon to Michael’s plans from Mrs. Forrest, she told was come home and only out in the town bring her back here seemed restoring her tation.”

“I thought,” interrupted Charlie, “tha could not sleep out of their parishes—”

"Own parishes during the publication of their banns. It ought to be so; and probably he was at Manchester for the fortnight—though I thought otherwise."

"Well, I think he deserved to win her, eh, father?"

"By fair means, not foul. Poor Victoria!" he added, in a much softened voice, "what must it have cost one so proud to stoop to such an action, or to look back on it when done? If she had but waited to think twice before acting on the impulse of the moment—"

"Her impulses are always generous."

"Yes; no doubt she complied with Michael's scheme, in order that he might leave England the more happily. Poor child! No doubt she is right in saying, no one can know the misery which the secret has brought upon herself."

Charlie was still sitting on the table,—a very old trick of his; and, somehow, it had long done Mr. Franklyn's eyes good to see how little his son was troubled with that fear of him in trifles, which still spoilt the pleasure of his intercourse with some of his best-loved pupils, especially his earlier ones. The young man had begun his last speech thoughtfully, and with a somewhat heated brow; and now, so soon as that with which his father had inter-

rupted him was finished, continued to say, looking his father fully in the face as he spoke—

"Victoria never *does* stop to think of her own feeling before showing kindness to another ; and a blessing her never stopping to think twice of her generous impulses has been to me ! Last February, if it had not been for her, I should have been rusticated. You don't know the awful mess I had got in," proceeded Charlie, dropping the unnatural deliberation of the commencement of this speech for his ordinary quick, carelessly-worded sentences, the flush upon his brow spreading over his whole face, as he continued, " You were lying here ill—but no one could have done anything. I had been led on by others, and those others behaved very generously : to save me and you, one of them sent in a true account of the uproar, implicating himself most awfully. He was rusticated for a year ; but we knew it was all no good, and I had resolved, as soon as I formally knew my fate, to go off to Australia. I could not have faced you again, father, nor any of you," added Charlie, almost sobbing. " And then all of a sudden it turned out that Reynart was rusticated for a year, but we others let off easily compared with our deserts. We had an awfully severe lecture, but I couldn't hear a word of it for thinking what *you* had all

been spared. I only hoped it would end in time for me to write off the good news to my little Vic that night, little thinking it was she who had got us all let off."

"What do you mean, Charlie?"

"That directly she got my note, telling her that I knew a few hours later it would be all up with me, and that I should start off for Australia at once, and she must break it to you all, she started off for Cambridge, somehow got into the combination-room, and wouldn't leave it till the old President himself had promised I should not be harmed. God bless her!"

And once again Mr. Franklyn remained mute with astonishment; pain at Charlie's having deserved such disgrace being entirely lost in amazement at such a breach of all university precedents and etiquette. Victoria, his own daughter, a carefully-trained girl of nineteen, forcing herself into a college meeting, and (Charlie had insinuated) refusing to leave it till the President of Muriel himself had been—what? bewitched or coerced into soothing her, with promises made irrespective of all justice! Mr. Franklyn, remembering such college meetings in his own days, might well, after some vain efforts at understanding what he was thus called upon to believe, rest his grey head

upon his hand with a patient, weary sigh, and feel that the middle of the nineteenth century had left him far behind it; that the men of his generation were already become those of an age past, not only in thoughts, but manners also.

Charlie, too, kept some minutes' silence; then he slid off the table, went behind his father's chair and put his hand caressingly on his shoulder, to say, "Father, that frightful escape was the turning-point of my life. I don't feel afraid now, when poor Reynart does come back, of being again entangled in his set,—indeed, I *could* not again run the risk of so grieving you. Won't you forgive me?"

"My poor boy, I had forgotten that I had anything to forgive," answered Mr. Franklyn, uncovering his eyes with another patient sigh, "except Victoria's having committed such a terrible indiscretion."

"Remember, father, she was 'Mrs. Forrest' all the while; no doubt this helped to give her courage to do such a generous, heroic thing. Think, father, how it would have been if she had *not* done it; I am afraid my wickedness would have killed *you*. I felt mad when I heard how ill you were, how any excitement might prove fatal,—otherwise I could never have let poor Reynart exculpate my-

self of the worst of the misdoings, at his own cost."

"Charlie, I wish that you had told me of this before."

"I have wanted to do so ever so often, especially when you came home so pleased when old Singleton had praised my steadiness. You have never made me afraid of telling you I had done wrong," interposed Charlie, with the genuine affection which was once more balm to his father's heart; "but Victoria had made me promise not to tell you. She knew you better than I did, and said that, though her great happiness in its success had been the saving you pain, you would be too much shocked at a daughter of yours having done such an unprecedented thing, to be able to realize what her doing it had averted. She said 'it was happiness enough to have been able to serve you in secret.' Poor child, I know, now, why she said it so humbly."

"Yes. Well, Charlie, read through the letters, will you?—and tell me what you think of them."

"I will; but, father, come out for a little fresh air first; you don't know how ill you look."

"Is it any wonder, when, in one morning, I hear that my daughter has been married fifteen months, and that my son was saved rustication

by an only less indiscretion on her part?" And yet the sad words were uttered with a smile, faint and weary it is true, but tinged neither with bitterness nor remorse; and their utterer, even as they were spoken, rose to comply with his son's suggestion.

"Well, Charlie?" Father and son had returned to the study, and Mr. Franklyn had been looking through a coming sermon, whilst his son had been perusing the three letters before him. For that to Mr. Franklyn had contained not only one to Victoria, but another note within this last for her father, which she was to give him if she would like him now to be acquainted with their marriage; or, by the same mail, Michael had written the tidings of his being a married man to George Forrest, and asked him to go down and break the news to Bayfield, if Lady Forrest should ask him to do so; if he heard nothing from her, to keep his secret. "For, if you like it best, love, keep it all till I come home, and can bear your father's anger my own self. I only wish that was what I could be doing when you'll be about getting these poor letters in my place. By the next mail, I *must* come over to you, or I shall break my heart entirely at being parted, darling wife, from you, when now there is no one who can say me nay."

"I tell you what I like in him, father, his having taken so much pains—such a thoughtless fellow as he was—to save her pain."

"And frustrating all his good intentions by directing to her 'Lady Forrest.' She no longer had any choice but to own the truth."

"You may be sure that that is what she would have done, had he made the blunder or not. Father, you must forgive her; fifteen months' keeping of such a secret has been punishment enough, I'm sure."

"Yes; it has very much changed her."

"Michael's coming will bring back her good looks," said Charlie; "but I wish that stupid old Mrs. Cavin had not stopped me at all, or that I had not stopped at all to listen to her. What if he *should* be dead!"

"In that case, surely we should have been the first to have been written to. Some of his Indian friends know how matters really stand with him; you see he tells me that his first act was to make a will leaving everything to her that was in his power."

"Yes. I've—I've a very uncomfortable feeling," said Charlie, rising and walking about the room, "that Victoria is—that George Forrest is at this moment the actual master of Old Forest. I—I shall go up to town by the afternoon's train, and

see if *he* has any later news; the first intimation of such a death would be sent to him—or you."

"Yes, go," said Mr. Franklyn; and at that moment there was a knock, and Victoria entered, saying, "Papa, may I have my own letter again?"

She was very quiet and gentle; her appearance not, now, so much remarkable for the presence of joy, as for the absence of the load of care which had for the last fifteen months weighed upon it.

"Yes; it is here," said Mr. Franklyn taking it from the other papers; "and, my poor child, come back to me. Charlie has—my dear, you suffered yourself to be led very much astray rather than pain him you loved; but Charlie tells me that you did as much for me only last February!"

"That was the only happy day I have had, papa, since I—I did give way to Michael's pressings. Oh, father, that was a great sin; I see it now," and she flung her arms wildly round his neck and gasped for breath; whilst Charlie slipped away to find his mother and take her the good news that father and daughter were at one again.

Had Mr. Franklyn, at length, learned to show mercy with cheerfulness?

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OLD FOREST.

“**M**Y dear, I am afraid I have been asleep,” said Mrs. Saunderson, that same evening, rousing herself to find that the glow of sunset had faded into twilight, and that only the dark outline of Mildred’s figure was now visible against the western window.

“Yes, you have, aunt; but it is very pleasant to listen to the sea, even when one cannot see it!”

“Well! I’m glad you have had the sea for a companion; but I am afraid your father will think I have turned you from a practical, to a sentimental young lady. You would not have been able to sit an hour doing nothing when you first came to me!”

“I mean to set very hard to work again when I get home,” said Mildred, who felt that there was some truth in this assertion.

“You must often be very dull at home?”

“Oh no, never; I have often been much duller

at Manchester,—I mean,” added the girl in sudden confusion at this rudeness, “it is not having many things which you *must* do, that makes one dull.”

“ You seem to me to have had a number of things you *must* do ever since you have been with me, my dear.”

“ Only an hour’s practice for mother, and an hour’s Greek for father.”

“ And enough too when a girl’s out for a holiday ; but now, my dear, ring the bell, and we will have tea and candles.”

With the candles was brought a letter from Launcelot, saying that he would make time to come down and fetch his mother home the next week, as she seemed so particularly to wish it.

“ Of course I wish it,” said the old lady, a little pettishly ; “ has not he always taken me to, and brought me home from, the sea every year yet, and does he think I want him less as I grow older ?”

“ He has been so busy—”

“ Still he might have been oftener.”

“ We are so many miles from a railway station—”

“ Then why did he choose such an out-of-the-way place for me.”

“ But it is its being so out of the way that makes it so pleasant and unlike—”

"Well, Milly, I am sure I thought you had been as much disappointed as myself at his never once having been to see us."

"Yes, I did hope he would have come at least once."

"I shall not go so far away from home another year," said the old lady; "I'm getting too old for such long journeys. I wish Launcelot would marry, and give me a daughter to look after me."

"He—is not he almost too old?"

"Too old!—what, Launcelot? Quite a young man, my dear; only one-and-thirty last August."

"He looks older."

"Perhaps he does. Never knew a boy so alter as he did at Cambridge; he took your little sister's death to heart in the most extraordinary manner, for she was but a child, after all!"

"I knew that he put up the painted window to little Mary."

"Yes, and had given her the organ, and still can never bear to talk of her. I tried to laugh him out of such nonsense at one time, but it did not do; indeed I don't think he has ever forgiven me that laugh. I liked the child very well myself, the little I saw of her. Your family and ours saw very little of each other in those days, my dear; but as for the beauty he pretended to find in her,

she was no more to be compared to Victoria than—than you are, Miss Milly!"

"She was very good."

"Yes; a very quiet little thing; clever, too, they said. And now, my dear, make the tea, will you? and then come and read Lancy's letter to me; he doesn't write so well as he used, and I can't make out all he says about the Grants."

Four days later, Launcelot Saunderson came down to Cromer, stayed the night, escorted his mother and cousin up to town the next day, and in town another night was spent; and in town there reached him a letter which, practised man of business as he was, gave him a great shock.

Only his mother was by, and she did not scruple to ask at once, "What was the matter?"

"My uncle wishes me to tell you, and poor Milly too,—I wonder he can take it so calmly,—to think—"

"But, Lancy, what is it?"

"Only that when Victoria was with us, last June twelvemonth, she and Michael Forrest were married at our own parish church."

"You don't say so!" and the old lady leant back aghast; "how could I help it, my dear?"

"No, Mr. Franklyn does not blame either of us; how could we imagine that any child of his

could be so utterly unprincipled?" added Launcelot sternly. He was thinking of *das kleine Mütterchen*; for, even upon the dead, the dishonour of this clandestine marriage, in his eyes, cast its shadow.

"To think of such a beautiful girl—one who might now, if she had chosen, have been the wife of the richest man in Manchester—tying herself for life to such a funny little fellow as Mike Forrest; by the bye, he is Sir Michael now, I suppose!"

"Yes; I am not surprised at Victoria's preferring birth *and* wealth to wealth alone. I never could endure her from a child; but if any but her father had told me this of her, I should—" And Launcelot paused.

"Sixteen months ago, you say; you don't mean from *our* house."

"Yes; how could she dare come back to us again? Poor Milly! this is enough to break her heart!"

"So Victoria has really been Lady Forrest all this time; was, when she was with us this very last time. How astonished Mr. Grant will be!"

"How ashamed we shall be before him!" said Launcelot briefly.

"Well, you know, my dear, I always did say your uncle was a great deal too strict with his

children, and that there would be some such end to it as this."

"He was never half strict enough with Victoria; at least, a great deal too patient: if ever child needed sharpness, she did."

"Well, Launcelot, the idea of your thinking your uncle too lenient!"

"His illness in 1846 altered him very much," said Launcelot, with recovered calmness.

"And little Mary's death, too, I expect, it was a great blow to him;" and Mrs. Saunderson, furtively, watched her son's countenance keenly.

"Yes!" was all his answer.

"And then, Charlie, I am sure he was allowed to do what you would never have dared to do at his age."

"He was at *home*, where I was at *school*; my uncle never showed so much wisdom as in sending his own son away from home for education."

"I never believed he would trust his training to any one but himself; I declare I remember your poor father said, 'Yes, he would, for he was a sensible man at the bottom, with all his odd Oxford notions.'"

"My father and he would have got on now," said Launcelot thoughtfully.

"Yes; I'm sure his letting me have so much of

Milly's a wonder which I can't understand yet ; she's a dear good girl, very like what her mother was when I first knew her."

"And, poor girl, she has to be told this shame!"

"I wonder your uncle did not wait till she reached home."

"He hoped to save Victoria pain ; the shame would not have harmed *her*."

"Poor girl! But you were always so hard on her ; and last year she really was a beauty ; I did not think so much of her this summer."

"She had had time to repent selling herself to do evil," said Launcelot, grimly.

"Poor thing!"

"Don't waste your pity on her, mother. The world will very soon forget and forgive when she is installed as Lady Forrest, of the Old Forest, Dorchester ; George always said it was a very fine old place."

"And he would have had it but for little Mike ;" and then Mildred came in, and the conversation ceased.

Almost immediately after breakfast, Launcelot was to take Mildred to the friends under whose care she was, that day, to return to Bayfield. He must lose no time in telling her his ill-news ; so he

detained her, as she was following his aunt out of the breakfast-room, to say—

“ I have heard from your father this morning, Milly.”

“ Yes,” she said ; alarmed at his tone, and yet quiet.

“ He wishes me to break to you a great trouble, Milly ;” and, as Mildred stole up to him, as if thus to gather strength to bear such trouble, he unconsciously put his arm round her, much as he had put it round *das kleine Mütterchen* when he had told her that he was prohibited, henceforth, from going with her to her church-practice, “ You know that Michael Forrest is of age, has come into his great-uncle’s property. He has written to your father to tell him——”

“ Oh, Launcelot ! He does not give Victoria up after all her waiting ?”

“ She did not wait, Milly, and there is the great harm ; she has been married to him more than fifteen months,—whilst you were both staying with us for the Manchester Exhibition.”

Mildred said nothing ; and Launcelot did not seek to make her face speak for her. At length she looked up to say, “ It was very wicked.”

“ It was indeed.”

“ But oh, Launcelot, you don’t know how mis-

rable she has been ever since. I am sure he made her do it."

"No one can make another do a great sin. Nothing, nothing would have tempted your sister Mary; it is profanation, even to say that nothing could—" he broke off incoherently.

"If Mary had only been alive; and with her, instead of me—"

"Victoria never behaved properly to Mary. Verily, 'the good *are* taken from the evil to come.'"

"You put that on the window, Lancy," said Mildred, looking into his face, with that old look.

"Yes, in *faith*; now faith *is* lost in sight. Poor Mary, she could never have borne this."

"Oh, yes, Lancy, if God had sent it to her;—had not taken her away first."

And then Launcelot felt rebuked, in his turn; and, after a moment's silence, loosed his arm and said, "Your father wished me to tell you this, that you might not be surprised to find Victoria 'Lady Forrest,' instead of Miss Franklyn. George Forrest is down there on business,—Michael has begged him to act for him until he himself is home."

"Is he coming home soon?"

"Next mail; then he will take his wife to her true home." And he longed for the arrival of that day, almost as much as did Victoria herself.

To think who it really was who, for fifteen months, had been playing on Mary's organ, teaching her choir, passing by her grave ! At the very thought Launcelot, again and again, during that fortnight of expectation, groaned aloud for patience.

"The Indian mail's in at Marseilles," said Charles Franklyn, one October morning, turning at once to that part of the '*Times*' containing such news, as soon as the '*Times*'—the Franklyns now had it by train the very morning of publication, instead of a day old from the London barrister, George Forrest,—was put into his hands.

Victoria was sitting at work by him : her fingers moved a little faster, that was all.

"We shall have our letters to-morrow, then," said Mrs. Franklyn.

"We hope she will produce something better than letters, mother," answered Charlie, with a mischievous glance at Victoria ; but Victoria made no sign.

"I'd—I'd give anything for this week to be over," said the young man, some hours later, to Mildred ; "I believe I am almost as sick at heart as poor little Vic herself."

The next day came, and brought no letter : "they had expected them too soon," so it was said, until more detailed Indian news was found in the

Times ;' and then Mildred said, " But if he himself is coming, he would not write too."

The afternoon of that day week, as Mr. Franklyn was crossing the green, he saw the London train approaching. He changed his course, turned quickly towards the station, mounted the steps, and was on the platform, when George Forrest alighted.

" How do you do ? " he said ; and then the two turned by common instinct into the lane leading away from the green.

" What news ? " asked the rector at last, finding his companion silent.

" He—he is alive," said George Forrest, in a tone of great grief ; " I went down to Southampton to meet him ; he was there, and he insisted upon being taken at once to the Old Forest ; he sent me here to beg you and Mrs. Franklyn to bring Lady Forrest to him there."

" Is he so very ill ? "

" He cannot possibly recover ; the 'Ruby' surgeon told me he would not have survived the voyage, had it not been for his determination not to die without seeing his wife again. Mr. Madden told him of his danger, that he thought he would never even reach Gibraltar ; but Mike said, ' Ye don't know me, Madden ; I've resolved to see my wife before I die, and I'll just do it.' "

"But why not stop at Southampton?"

"No; he had resolved to go on at once to the Old Forest. One could not argue with him, otherwise I should not have been *here* now, and have left him to the care of servants. You had better go up to town, Sir, by the 4.30 train; you have just an hour." And then, also by common instinct, the former tutor and pupil turned round and walked quickly home to the rectory; but, at its threshold, they paused and looked at each other: which could tell their tidings?

"Tell her mother," said George, in a hoarse whisper; but even as he spoke, Victoria stood beside them.

"Do not fear," she said, with perfect gentleness and calmness; "I knew he would never come back. *Where* did he die?"

"He is not dead," began George Forrest, passionately.

"My dear, George has come to fetch us to him; he is at the Old Forest,—very ill,—but we hope to find him alive."

So, just one hour later, Charles and Mildred were the only occupants of the rectory, and straining their eyes to catch the last wreathings of the steam of that train which had taken away the four sad travellers.

George Forrest's own terrible fear was, that Michael should have broken down on his way to the Old Forest ; that they should reach it, and find him not there. He had taken every precaution to be immediately apprised of such a too likely additional trouble, but when they reached Dorchester, no telegram to that effect was awaiting them ; and when they reached the Old Forest, there was the hatchment of the old Sir Michael over the door, but the windows were not darkened for his young successor.

"How is Sir Michael ?" asked George, with sudden courage.

"Much the same, Sir ; he begged that you would bring my lady up to him at once."

And so Victoria was ushered up the broad old staircase to the room where was her husband ; a room so large that even the large old-fashioned bed, on which he lay, seemed lost in it. She began to feel that her title was no empty mockery ; her father, mother, and George, to feel *why* her husband had sent for her there, instead of to Southampton.

"Well, my pretty one," was Michael's faint greeting, as Victoria knelt down beside him, and took his poor, thin, weather-browned hand in hers.

The old words, and none could have sounded

more sweetly in her ears ; whilst the tone, as of one enjoying perfect satisfaction and happiness, after long sickness of body and mind, brought tears into the eyes of their only auditor, save Victoria herself,—George Forrest,—who closed the door upon them, and they were thus left alone.

It was not many words that were spoken between them ; it was enough for Michael to gaze through his heavy aching lids upon his wife ; for her to have him at last ! After such months of pain : to know that it was his fingers that were clasping hers ; there was, just then, no time for sorrow.

And Sir Michael did not die, but grew better. Two months Mrs. Franklyn stayed with her daughter at the Old Forest, and only left it when Michael and his wife went abroad. He was not allowed to winter in England ; and though the journey—before he was really well enough to be moved—was in itself a risk, they went.

Mrs. Franklyn's husband's duties had long since called him home. Once, only, had he seen his young son-in-law ; and then Victoria had stayed his steps upon her husband's threshold with the feverish entreaty, “ Father, if only that he is little Mary's brother-in-law, be merciful ! ” She could not, at that time, interpret the faint sad smile

which was her only answer, and waited outside the door for that dreaded conference to be over, reproaching herself bitterly for having yielded her own wishes to Sir Michael's strong desire, nay, determination, to apologize to his father-in-law with his own lips, before he left the Forest, for the wrong that he had done him.

She better knew what that faint sad smile had meant when, only five minutes later,—her father had at least been merciful to *her* in staying with his son-in-law but for so brief a space,—Michael drew her face down upon his pillow to whisper with a smile, meant to reassure her, but tremulous, and as of one bewildered, “Victoria, he would not pretend to say it was not a wrong, yet he will have it that he himself was, also, much to blame. I can't take it all in yet, my pretty one, but I think I can go to sleep now, and with a better conscience than I've had these sixteen months. Och! I'm so glad it's over!” and in the smile with which he then closed his weary eyes, his wife first met—and with what a thankful heart!—a glimmer of that old sauciness which she had little thought ever to see again.

In the spring they returned home again. Sir Michael was not well—no, never would be; both he and Victoria had long ago made up their minds

CHAPTER XV.

MILDRED'S LAST NIGHT.

IN a few weeks, Lady Forrest returned to her old home. Her husband had left her well provided for. Even Launcelot Saunderson was greatly moved on learning, that before leaving England in 1857, he had largely insured his life; and all that he had then had out of which to keep up the insurance was his ensign's pay, and his great-uncle's very moderate allowance to his heir.

"Love taught him self-denial," thought Launcelot, when, on his first visit to Bayfield after Sir Michael's death, Mr. Franklyn told him with pleasure of this act.

"And it is well, poor fellow, that he made that insurance," continued Mr. Franklyn after a pause, "for after he came into his property his health was so shattered that he could not have effected any; the estates are strictly entailed, and I am not a rich man. It is a comfort to me that Victoria is provided for in something like the luxury

to which she has lately been accustomed. I shall the better be able to leave my little Milly enough for her simple wants. Launcelot, I should like to leave her to your guardianship. Happily, my other children are of age; still I look to you to help them in any difficulty."

Launcelot accepted the office. Mildred was now nineteen; he wondered whether, had she lived, *das kleine Mütterchen* would likewise have been commended to his care: but had she lived she would long since have been his wife, or— but Launcelot had never dreamt of any alternative, and did not dream of it now.

It was a Sunday morning on which his uncle thus addressed him; a few minutes later they were on their way to the morning service, and Launcelot rebuked himself for dreading to find that Lady Forrest had resumed her old post as organist; neither of his cousins had followed their mother into the rectory seat, but when the first note was struck he drew breath again. That was not Lady Forrest's bold, clear, ~~and~~—yes, even if he had ~~ever~~ been compelled to ~~see~~ ~~the~~ music—~~feeling~~ feeling toned; it was ~~Mildred's~~ unique, ~~such~~, far from brilliant mind which evoked ~~surviving~~ that quiet, ~~surviving~~ ~~unary~~. It was ~~Mildred's~~ mind with something ~~surviving~~ ~~such~~ ~~surviving~~

which Launcelot Saunderson had been seeking again to find these thirteen years. And he was right ; *das kleine Mütterchen* had possessed powers of mind which no care or training could impart to the equally diligent and dutiful, but less highly gifted sister.

It was long before Launcelot caught sight of the face of his cousin Victoria, and then it was not that he had *sought it*. It was harvest-time, the schoolmistress, Miss Peters, was away for her holiday, and Lady Forrest was taking charge of the few village children who had not been too worn-out with the week's gleaning to seek their accustomed places in the church. The sad, patient, and still lovely face beneath the widow's cap rebuked him ; and enabled him to bear with patience the sweeping of that long black dress by Mary's grave, ten minutes later.

After the Christmas of 1860, Mildred once more paid a visit to Laurel House ; Mrs. Saunderson was no longer equal to any lengthened journey from home, and begged for the companionship of this favourite niece during part of the long winter.

“ Ah, Launcelot !” she said, when the promised visit of six weeks had been paid and could not be exceeded, for neither was Mrs. Franklyn so strong as she had been and Victoria was breaking down

single-handed in that winter's work, "if you would only make that girl your wife, how happy I should be."

"You would like it, mother?" he asked tenderly.

"Should I not? your never marrying has been such a disappointment to me, Launcelot; but if your long waiting ends in your giving me Mildred Franklyn for a daughter, I can forgive your overlooking Lucy Forrest and Emma Grant, such nice girls as they both are."

The old lady sighed; and Launcelot could not but smile to think how heart-whole and unconsciously he had walked through the toils which he now saw had been laid for him.

"My dear mother," he then said, "until a year or two ago, I never, since I became a man, had thought of marrying; and since then I have been looking for what I know, now, I shall never find; no, never!" and with a deep sigh he was gone. He had once almost persuaded himself that Mildred Franklyn was all "his little Polly" would have been; but he had long since known better.

That evening, the last of Mildred's stay, he called her into his room—the room which she had never yet entered—as she passed it, and then said, in the cold tone under which he had learned, from

his uncle, to cover deep emotion, “Milly, I have a picture here which I think you will like to see;” and then he shut the door, and leading her to the mantelpiece, turned the lock of the home-scene of thirteen years ago at Bayfield Rectory, and first showed to a fellow-creature his long secret treasure.

Mildred had no need to ask of what it was a picture, although she could not remember her father looking so young or strong, whilst Launcelot still remembered how the winter of 1847 had altered his appearance. She gazed long with glowing cheeks and glistening eyes, and then said, “Thank you, Launcelot; has father seen it?”

“Oh no!”

“I was thinking how much pleasure it would give him; he was so very fond of little Mary.”

Yes, Mildred invariably spoke of the dead elder sister as “little Mary;” but to Launcelot she was always the embodiment of the words—

“There is no Death! What seems so is transition;
This life of mortal breath
Is but a suburb of the life elysian,
Whose portal we call Death.

“She is not dead,—the child of our affection,—
But gone into the school
Where she no longer needs our poor protection,
And Christ himself does rule.

“ In that great cloister's stillness and seclusion,
 By guardian angels led,
Safe from temptation, safe from sin's pollution,
 She lives, whom we call dead.

“ Day after day we think what she is doing
 In those bright realms of air ;
Year after year, her tender steps pursuing,
 Behold her grown more fair.

“ Thus do we walk with her, and keep unbroken
 The bond which nature gives,
Thinking that our remembrance, though unspoken,
 May reach her, where she lives.

“ Not as a child shall we again behold her,
 For when with raptures wild
In our embraces we again enfold her,
 She will not be a child ;

“ But a fair maiden in her Father's mansion,
 Clothed with celestial grace ;
And beautiful with all the soul's expansion
 Shall we behold her face.

“ And though at times impetuous with emotion
 And anguish long suppressed,
The swelling heart heaves, moaning like the ocean,
 That cannot be at rest.

“ We will be patient, and assuage the feeling
 We may not wholly stay ;
By silence sanctifying, not concealing,
 The grief that must have way.”

"And that dear old window," continued Mildred after a pause, "I hope that no one who comes after us will ever alter that."

"No, indeed!" said Launcelot hastily; he had never before thought of such a deed as possible.

"Thank you, Launcelot," repeated his young cousin; "you, too, were very fond of her."

"'Very fond' is a poor expression. She was the good angel of my life; love for her gave me courage to submit to a sharpness of discipline for which my home-life had ill-prepared me; she showed me the beauty of obedience and faith; and, fall as I would, never failed to turn aside to help me back again into the one true way. Mildred, does your father ever tell you that you are like her?"

"He said something of the kind once, when I had been crying over my Greek," answered Mildred, ashamed and yet constrained to speak the truth; "he had told me that Mary construed better at eleven than I did at fourteen, and when I sobbed that I could never be like Mary, he said, yes, I was in some things, though I only had ordinary abilities, and she had had a mind of a much higher order."

"Yes, she had; dear little thing!" said Launcelot with glistening eyes, reverting to the days he had first known her; "she was for a long time fu

ahead of myself in very many things, helped me to learn the Church Catechism, and—" and then he stopped short to say, with imitative calmness, "yes; I should be sorry to see one brick of Bayfield altered," and, as he spoke, he closed the cover of the picture.

"Good night, Launcelot!"

"Good night! We must be early to-morrow, Milly."

"Yes. I wish aunt were better. I wish I could have stayed longer."

"So do we both. You seem like one of ourselves now, Milly."

"Yes; this always seems a second home," she answered, meeting his gaze with one of her sweet content smiles; "and it will seem so more than ever, now that you have let me see that picture."

"I showed you that picture, Mildred, because, until you knew how deeply I had 'loved' your little Mary,—how from the first day I saw her I resolved to make her my wife so soon as we were of an age to marry,—I could not ask you whether you yourself would be such. I cannot pretend to give you all I gave to her,—the love of youth cannot be kindled twice,—but I do love you dearly. I would do my best to make you happy."

He paused a second, and Mildred did not speak;

and so he added, almost as a father to a child, and at threc-and-thirty he felt as a middle-aged man and she still as a girl, "Do not hurry yourself, dear; you can write to me from Bayfield. Only, if it is to say 'No,' do not let what I have said to-night cost my mother the greatest pleasure she has left her. Still come to us. I will never allude to what has just now passed."

"Launcelot, you cannot doubt what I shall say," said Mildred, raising her brown eyes to his; and love gave to them that heavenly light which they had ever, hitherto, wanted in his sight.

"It is not 'No'?" he asked, with a grave smile of anything but doubt.

"Oh, no!" and she clasped her two hands round his arm; and, again looking up into his face, his lips kissed her smooth brown brow,—lips that had touched no child nor woman's forehead (and no woman's *cheek* save that of his own mother and of Mary's mother) since they had been pressed upon the fevered brows of the unconscious *kleines Mütterchen*. Mildred little knew this: and it was very long before Launcelot told her what that kiss had really been.

The next day, Launcelot travelled with Mildred to Bayfield—the well-known way, one he had traversed with how many various feelings. It was



with a very sober happiness that, to-day, he neared his little Mary's home. Till he turned to gaze on Mildred's face, I will not say but that he repented of the last night's deed.

Yes, Mildred had been needed. Mrs. Franklyn was growing old as well as her husband; Lady Forrest was looking worn and fagged, yet was most painfully patient, even cheerful; for the spirits of youth were what was needed in her home, and was she not still young in years? And had she not a great sin towards her parents to expiate? When Charlie was ordained to his father's curacy next summer, then she hoped to be able to give way again, and feel at liberty to look back upon a past on which she now seldom dared to dwell.

Launcelot Saunderson stayed the night; and, when he and Mr. Franklyn were thus first alone, he told him of his last night's doing, calmly and quietly. How different, ten years back, would have been his passionate pleading for 'little Mary'!"

"Take her, Launcelot," said Mr. Franklyn, with quiet warmth, laying his shrunk hand upon his nephew's. "There is no need to say, 'God's blessing be with you both,' you have both so long enjoyed this blessing."

"Yet, uncle, one question, which comes strangely now, and which I yet must ask. Had I asked you

for a daughter ten years ago, and that daughter been dear Mary, would you have given her to me as readily?"'

" You were a comparatively young and untried man then, Launcelot."

" Five-and-twenty. I had meant to wait till she were eighteen."

" Yes; I may say that I should have given her to you with equal readiness; by five-and-twenty I knew your worth."

" Any worth I have ever possessed has been owing to her," said Launcelot, looking steadily into the fire, with eyes dimmed with tears, " and—
to you."

Had Mr. Franklyn at length learned to grant a favour with a good grace? I think his old friend Charles Saunderson would, himself, gladly have owned as much.

Launcelot was not yet quite humble enough to be able to add, how unworthy he felt to be even Mildred's husband. How harsh and hard he now felt beside the man who had done so much to form his character, whose freedom from earthly passions he had set himself to attain when the great blow of his life had fallen on him. But Mr. Franklyn at three-score and three was so truly humble, that he could say easily—

“ Some things, Launcelot, you learnt from me too well ; a great deal of disappointment and suffering has been needed to teach me ‘ mercy and not sacrifice.’ I can thank God, now, for the bitter strokes at the time so hard to bear. I hope, I feel sure,” added the old man, with his kindly, yet, in Launcelot’s eyes, pathetic smile, “ that *happiness* will do for you what I would not let it do for me.”

And Launcelot, as he pressed the hand laid earnestly on his, felt as if he could have kissed it, but did only press it, uttering, “ Thank you,” with dimmed eyes, and remembering, with full heart, “ Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” Yet he could scarcely bear to think that one stroke—Mary’s death—repeated illnesses—Victoria’s sin—past fears for Charlie—had been laid upon Mary’s father in even loving *correction*.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STEWARDSHIP OVER.

L AUNCELOT and Mildred waited until Victoria's first year of mourning was past, and then, early in August, 1861, Mr. Franklyn joined them together until death should part them. It was a strange feeling, and yet not strange in him, that made Launcelot Saunderson's first request as husband be, that Mildred would again play the simple voluntary of July the 29th, 1860.

Charlie had given her away. He had been ordained deacon on the previous Trinity Sunday; of his own free choice had he entered holy orders; he had been ordained to his father's curacy. Mr. Franklyn's original wish had been, that it should be otherwise; surely, it would be better for the young man to learn his work in a wider sphere. But he could no longer, himself, do without a curate; perhaps Charles, as well as himself, felt that this help would be needed but a short time, that he would soon be free to find a wider

school; and the father yielded to the son's eager wish.

It happened as they had foreseen: his wife and children; his old pupils, who, in these Mr. Franklyn's gentler, later years, had rallied round him like true sons,—had gradually been prepared for the coming end. On Christmas Day of 1861, he and his son together administered the Holy Communion to his wife and daughters, George Forrest, the country gentleman; Claude Reynart, the Australian missionary, home for his first holiday since his ordination twelve years back; and Frank Jones, the civil engineer; of his favourite pupils only Launcelot was, that day, missing. Mrs. Saunderson was grown so feeble, that he and his young wife could not leave her. On that day Mr. Franklyn caught a cold, which once again settled on his chest; there was but little strength left in him with which to grapple long with death, and after little pain and much patience, he died January 1st, 1862.

He was laid beside *das kleine Mütterchen*; and there were many true mourners for him besides those who were gathered round his coffin on the mild, rainy morning of the 8th. A stranger reads now, weekly, from the lectern which was one of Charles Franklyn's earliest gifts to Bayfield Church,

treads the encaustic tiles which were likewise of his giving, and is enlarging the rectory to make it a fitter home for his promised bride ; but his predecessor's widow and children, and especially his son-in-law, have begged him to leave undisturbed the oriel' parlour window ; and, though at a sacrifice of self, he has complied with their desire.

Mildred has now learned how her husband, a year ago, offered St. Saviour's, twice Bayfield's real value, for the living ; but, though the college were rebuilding their own chapel, and were in great want of funds, the offer was declined. Bayfield was the one living, still in their possession, which had formed part of the original foundation ; and, however tempting this cotton-spinner's offer might be, it could not be parted with. The college offered him another, but ten miles distant, and in a prettier part of the county, in the possession of an incumbent eighty years of age, instead of sixty-one. Launcelot had written back doubling his original offer, but in vain ; then, making it unlimited, but, for very shame, the College of St. Saviour's repeated their refusal ; and he had relinquished, in silence, a scheme upon which he had set his heart with a determination which almost alarmed himself.

Charles Franklyn soon found the wider sphere of work which his father had desired for him.

Mr. Singleton's brother had recently taken a large London living, which, amongst others, the new rector of Bayfield had passed by without hesitation, and the regret that it had not been St. Olaf's, of which the cotton-spinner, Mr. Saunderson, had, a year ago, been so eager to obtain possession. Charles Franklyn wrote to his former friend mentioning his wishes as to the needed curacy; and Mr. Singleton, in reply, asked him whether he would share his brother's London work. His mother and widowed sister live with him; and Mr. Singleton finds in Lady Forrest a second curate. She is the unwearied worker that his own wife fain would have been had health permitted her; and what comfort the sickly wife finds in Mrs. Franklyn's motherly love and care there is scarcely need to add, save that "the meek," "the peacemakers," are, as has been Margaret Franklyn herself in the past pages, often overlooked in this world; but then even greater than their value in this earth will be their reward elsewhere.

And, so, stranger-fingers stray over the keys of Mary's organ, and strange dresses brush by her lowly grave; and yet *das kleine Mütterchen*, as well as her father, still live in many hearts; and, in connection with their memories, ever arise in Launcelot's ears the words—

"The souls of the righteous are in the hands of God. . . . In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die, . . . but they are in peace. . . . And having been a little chastised, they shall be greatly rewarded: for God proved them and found them worthy for himself. . . . They that put their trust in him shall understand the truth: and such as be faithful in love shall abide with him: for grace and mercy is to his saints, and he hath care for his elect." (Wisdom iii.) "The hope of the ungodly is like the dust that is blown away with the wind. . . . But the righteous live for evermore; their reward also is with the Lord, and the care of them is with the Most High. Therefore shall they receive a glorious kingdom, and a beautiful crown from the Lord's hand: for with his right hand shall he cover them, and with his arm shall he protect them." (Wisdom v.)

This year Launcelot Saunderson and his wife were part of the 65,000 visitors to the International Exhibition of June 23rd. And this day each found in the crowded picture-galleries what occasioned them rare pleasure. Mildred here re-met that "Blue Boy" which her husband had taken such pains to render her capable of appreciating six years ago, when he was only the "cousin Launcelot"



of a happy time, from which she dated her first love of art. And Launcelot catching sight, amidst the surrounding crowd, of an all-but profile portrait of one in a white dress and blue ribbon, with red-brown hair, stood still to gaze his fill once more, this time of what did fulfil his ideal of that which little Mary would have been.

"It reminds me, dear, of what you were the night that the Wilcotts and Grants dined with us five years ago," he said tenderly, pressing the arm in his; "but, Mildred, it has also that which I was at that time trying so hard to find in you, and could not. It is *das kleine Mütterchen* herself: thank God, that I have seen this. Henceforth, I am content."

And then Mildred gazed also, till her eyes grew dimmed, at the soft, bright, sensible, modest face before them; but when she asked whose portrait it was, Launcelot said he knew not; he wished no other name attached to it. But Mildred glanced at the catalogue, and said, "The Empress of Austria." And, perhaps, few more earnest prayers are offered up for this young wife's preservation in health, than by that cotton-spinner and his wife; and, in that evening's planning of a winter trip to Venice, neither concealed from the other that something dearer far than architectural beauty now drew them thither; for Mildred is become as

tenderly attached to the memory of *das kleine Mütterchen* as Launcelot Saunderson himself, and her husband does not hide from his young wife even the deepest and most sacred feelings of his heart. 'Tis true, the projected trip to Venice has had long since to be abandoned for stern work at home ; but Launcelot and Mildred Saunderson think it no sin to look forward to a time when the pleasure, which they once believed such an excursion would have given them, will, once more, be within lawful reach.

THE END.

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